

St. Paul: On The Same page

07.13.14 for Pentecost 5a

Day One: Isaiah 55:10-13

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

What happens to the rain after it falls? Does it bounce back up into the clouds? In a sense it does, at the end of the water cycle. But it doesn't go directly back to the sky. First it falls on plants and soaks into the soil. Then it fills aquifers and overflows into creeks and streams and rivers. It flows down to lakes and eventually to the ocean. And all along the way some of it evaporates and returns to the atmosphere,

At every step along this process the rain that God has sent gives blessing to us. It gives life to the plants that we need for food. It fills the wells from which we drink. It gives

us streams and lakes where fish live that also provide us with food. Even when it evaporates it is a blessing, as it's evaporation cools the surface of the earth, and the water vapor in the atmosphere traps the sun's warmth and keeps the earth from losing all its heat into space.

God says that his word is like this. He speaks to us. He gives us his word through the prophets and apostles. And in every place where we find it God's word gives us life, gives us guidance, gives us comfort, gives us forgiveness.

What happens to your words after you speak them? Too often it seems like they bounce back, they just echo back to us without anyone really hearing them. "In one ear and out another," we say. But God promises HIS word is not like that. God's word, and especially his promises to us, will go forth like the rain – soak into our lives – and bring us one blessing after another.

Prayer: *O Lord, the rain has fallen and all around us the earth is blooming. Lord, let my life do the same as your word showers down upon me. Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 8:12-17

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

“Mom always liked you best.” That was a favorite comic line of the Smothers brothers back in the 70s. We all understood the joke because we knew about the competition between the first born and the children who come later.

For people in Bible times being “the first born son” was even more important. It didn’t just mean that mom or dad liked him best. It meant that he was the one to inherit most of the fortune. He was the one that the family depended on to carry on the name.

We often say that we are “children of God.” Many of our songs use that phrase, and we’re comforted to know that God is our Father. But the Bible actually goes further.

Paul doesn’t just say that we are God’s children. He says that Jesus has changed places with us. We are God’s sons. And he says that we are his heirs. In other words, it doesn’t matter if we are men or women, we have been put in the place of the first born son! We have been put in the place of Jesus!

How could all of us be like the firstborn son? How could God love us all the most? Ask a mother or father.

Although Tommy and Dick Smothers joked about which of them mom loved the best, most parents discover that their love grows with their family. They never run out. They can love each one of their children the most.

God has a special place for you, and you know that you can call out to him, “Daddy! Father!” and he will hear.

Prayer: *Dear Father, it’s hard for me to believe that I could be in the place of Jesus, the firstborn son. But fill me with joy at your gift so others too may find it. Amen.*

Day Three: Matthew 13:1-9

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow... He who has ears, let him hear."

How are your "listening skills"? When you listen to a lecture, do you take notes? When you listen to a sermon, does it sink in?

A friend of mine once told me that he was almost 30 years old before he suddenly realized that the sermon had stuff that was useful to his life! All his life he had attended church and gone through the ritual. He had listened enough to give the proper responses. But the pastor always seemed to be saying, "blah, blah, blah" to him. But when he came home from the Navy he was changed. And he suddenly heard important things about sin and forgiveness, about grief and joy, about death and life.

Jesus moved to a boat so that he could be more easily heard by such a large crowd of

people. And he urged the people to listen closely. Not just to hear, but to listen deeply. "He who has ears, let him hear." Many things are audible to us, but they go "in one ear and out the other."

What would it mean to really hear the story of the man who went out to sow his seed? It would mean knowing the significance of what Jesus said, and even more than that. It would mean understanding it's significance for YOU. (See tomorrow's devotion.)

Do you listen to sermons that way? Is that how you hear Jesus' teaching? If so, I wonder where you will be standing to hear him. At the back of the crowd where you can chat with your friends? Or will you be right on the shoreline where you can hear best?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, your words are precious to me. Help me to listen... really listen. And to hear with my mind, my heart, and my spirit. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 13:18-23

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path... ²³As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

When you see a bumper sticker, how do you react? Are there some you don't understand? Do some make you laugh? Do some make you angry? Do you sometimes think that you'll check the website or dial the phone number, but then you forget? Has a bumper sticker ever changed your mind?

Bumper stickers can only contain a very few words. Too many and they become unreadable. What difference can just a few words make?

Candidates believe that a few words can make a lot of difference. Even a sticker that only contains a name can help people to remember that name, or to realize that there

are many others who admire that person.

A bumper sticker is like a seed – just a small message that we hope will bear larger fruit when it is seen.

When we cast God's word out like seeds, people who hear the word have the same reactions that we have to bumper stickers. Some don't get it. Some laugh. Others get angry because they have a wrong idea about Christians. Some are interested, but too busy.

Some see and hear the name of Jesus, and they are moved to learn more. The seed takes root and a fragile plant is born. The seed bears the fruit of eternal life.

If you have believed, if the seed took root in your life and bore fruit, then you have many more seeds to sow. You received the name of Jesus, but now you know much more from his word. What will you do with those 30, 60, or 100 times the seed that you received?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, the seed of your love took root in me. By the power of your Spirit it grew. Now, Lord, let it bear fruit and grow in all around me. Amen.*