

“What Do We Hear?”

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our text this morning is a well-known parable to most of us. The parable of the Sower is a text used by many contemporary preachers to discuss what it means to be the good soil, to live a good life, and do all the right things for God, or how to be good enough in God’s eyes for the Word to take hold in our hearts. More simply put, what do WE need to do to be the good soil? But Jesus doesn’t provide us with a prescription for how to live our lives in this text, He simply says, “He who has ears, let him hear.” So, this morning we take on the bigger question, “What does it mean to hear?”

Our God has blessed His creation of man with these miniature radars on the sides of our heads called ears. Why? I can see things, touch them, and taste them. I can watch my pastor walk around the chancel and wave his arms a few times. Why do I need to hear his voice? I can receive the Sacrament of the Altar and touch and taste Christ’s body and blood, why do I need to hear the words of institution and distribution? All of these are valid questions. After all, God gave us 4 other senses. What makes hearing so important?

We hear from Jesus in this parable about a Sower. He’s out tossing around some seeds in hopes that they will grow and thrive, receiving the water and sunlight they need to do so, and thus becoming a flourishing plant. But that isn’t what happens to all of those seeds. The answer to the parable is given to us in verses 19-23 of our text. Jesus is teaching this parable to His disciples, and He explains it clearly so that there can be no confusion among them, so let’s do the same. The ones on the path are those who have heard the Word and Satan comes and snatches it away from them. They leave the doors unlocked and the lights on with a big flashing sign that says “come and get some free stuff.” Or maybe they’ve heard the Word, but they react with arrogance and contempt, saying “That couldn’t have been for me.” or “I’ll just hear the same thing next Sunday, so why should I listen now?” You see, if we don’t guard and protect the precious Word of God in our hearts, Satan will use every ounce of his being to work his way in and purge it from us. He despises the Word, and he knows Its power. So, he treats it like a stuck-on band-aid and rips it off as fast as he can so your wound won’t heal. That wound is your sinful nature, and you need to hear the Word of God to heal it.

Those on the rock have heard the Word with joy, believe it for a while, then fall away in times of trouble. When earthly troubles creep in, they turn to earthly answers like self-help podcasts or books, instead of The Good Book that promises help and

healing through Christ's death and resurrection. The sin that abides in us is always going to try its best to convince us that we can do this on our own. The devil is trying to get us to say, "Who needs that silly Jesus guy anyway?", because Satan wants nothing more than to pull us away from the knowledge of Christ's forgiveness found in the Word which we hear.

Those among the thorns have heard the Word but are choked out by the riches and cares of life. They neglect their faith, destroying the first table of the Law in favor of a little more sleep, or their kid's basketball game, or to prepare for Sunday brunch that afternoon. When we make the things of this life more important than feeding our faith with the hearing of God's word, we make a mockery of His law, because our sin has become a god, we aren't calling upon Him in every trouble, and we certainly aren't remembering the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy. Satan uses our wants and desires in this life to drive us further and further away from Jesus, our Savior. There is no level the devil won't stoop to in order to push us away from the knowledge we hear in God's Word that Satan is made powerless through Christ.

All of these examples in the parable have one very clear thing in common. The evil one is all around us. He's always there. From the moment we wake up, till the moment we fall asleep, and even all the time in between. He is literally the thing that nightmares are made of, as our minds dwell on the temptations and attacks he levies throughout our days. He is constantly attacking us, showing us all the things of this life that are better and more convenient than following God's law and hearing His Word. He exploits our weaknesses and knows just what buttons to push. He has one goal, one purpose. To turn us away from our Savior—our God—and replace what we hear in the Word with his own malignant and sinful words. When we hear the words of the evil one and allow them power by willfully engaging in sinful acts, we replace Christ with the devil himself.

But fear not the evil one, for Christ has vanquished the devil and his evil. His lies and deceit cannot overtake us because we are claimed as God's own. Through repentance and forgiveness offered to us through Christ's body and blood we can always overcome Satan and his attacks. And God tells us that in His forgiving and saving Word. So, why do you need to HEAR it? The Apostle Paul gives us that answer in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from the thing heard, and the thing heard through the Word of Christ." We hear God's Gospel in our ears to feed our faith. That is how God bolsters our faith and belief in Him. The Word has power. Without the Word being spoken and heard, our table fellowship is nothing more than eating and drinking, a simple act of sustenance for this body on earth. But we do not come to feed our bodies with

worldly food. We come to feed our souls with the food of the Spirit that comes from the thing heard, which is the saving Word of God proclaimed in the Scripture.

So, this brings us to the last group of seeds in the parable. Those in good soil have heard the Word and hold it fast in their heart, letting it bear fruit with patience. The Greek word used here by Luke that is translated as “heard”, is used to emphasize a single, important event—an isolated moment in time. It’s also no coincidence that this visual of a growing seed comes with the obvious accompaniment that a seed needs water to grow. Jesus says in John chapter 3, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” That single, one-time event where the Word is heard and water is applied is our baptisms. Then later, in verse 15, the Greek word translated as “hold” gives the sense indicating a continuous action of “holding firmly onto.” The seed in the good soil didn’t just hear and sprout fruit, it is holding onto the baptismal water it needs to grow. We hold firmly onto it in our hearts and our faith grows bearing good fruit in God’s time, not ours. We can’t water ourselves. God pours out faith on us through the Holy Spirit—through His Word. In order to be the good soil, we must firmly hold onto the Word of salvation through Christ and remember our baptisms as the moment God claimed us as His own. Baptizing us into the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of all of our sins. That is what we hear.

The apostle Paul knew the Law of Moses very well. Prior to his conversion, he followed what he read and lived his life according to that law, even to the point of persecuting those who followed Christ instead of that law. We read in Acts chapter 9 that at Paul’s conversion, he was struck blind for 3 days after hearing Jesus speak to him on the road to Damascus. The significance of his blindness is this: Jesus was telling him to stop believing what he sees in the Law, and actually hear the words of Moses and Jesus, because Moses was pointing directly to Christ, the Savior. The Lord then comes to His disciple Ananias and tells him to go to Paul and lay hands on him. Ananias must also trust what he hears and not what he sees, because what he has seen is Paul persecuting Christians like him. What he hears, however, is his Lord’s voice, and he trusts what he has heard and goes to Paul. The Word of God works through the means of voice being delivered into ears. Because we have heard the Word from Christ Himself, we share in the knowledge of His saving grace, that the Father sent His only begotten Son to take on flesh and die in our place. We deserve to be choked out by the thorns of this life, but at our baptisms we heard Christ say, “NO! I claim you as my own through this washing of water and the Word.”

Through His death and resurrection, we have been made heirs of the Kingdom of God and in this we must place our hope. The Apostle John can’t make it any more clear

in the first chapter of his Gospel account. Christ IS the Word! He is the life and light to which we must always turn. The forgiveness we have in Christ Jesus is the forgiveness we receive when our pastor stands before us each week and proclaims “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” We hear those words and it feeds us. It nurtures that seed and helps it blossom into faith, a faith that the evil one cannot touch because we are chosen children of God.

In Pastor Tim Killion’s former congregation in Alabama, a member named Ella had no problem making sure you knew she was there in church. You couldn’t avoid hearing her because it was not a pleasant sound when she sang, but she didn’t care. You could most certainly say that there were probably some who wish they didn’t have those ears God gave them when she started singing. But no matter how horrible the sound, it was the most beautiful expression of faith, and you couldn’t help but have your own faith strengthened through hearing it. The crass sound of her voice didn’t match the absolute joy, fervor, and zeal with which she sang, proclaiming the Word through the music of the liturgy and hymns. And hearing her belting out those notes (that were always the wrong ones) began to not matter. What you heard was the Word, and that made it the most beautiful sound you heard all day. No matter the sound it may seem to have or how much the world tells us to be quiet and keep it to ourselves, we must proclaim our faith, nurture it, and share it. Understand that what it means to be good soil has nothing to do with us and our actions, but has everything to do with the words that we hear and understand...that Christ has done that work for us on His redeeming journey to the bloody cross and in His glorious resurrection.

And so, we come back to the beginning, “He who has ears, let him hear.” Christ’s command is not simply for all of us, but for all around us. And that message is simple. Christ died for ALL people. Every person around us is one that Christ suffered and died for to buy their redemption from sin and the power of the devil. The Word serves a single purpose: to point us always to the one who has the words of eternal life—to Jesus Christ, our Savior, the Son of God. And He speaks those words to us through the Scripture, that we might hear them, and hold firmly onto them. And so, Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, herein lies our redemption: that through the means of God’s saving grace we have heard the Word from Christ Himself, been made pure in the waters of our baptisms, and through Jesus’ death and resurrection will have everlasting life with Him when He calls us home through His blessed Word, *heard from His own voice* on that last day. Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.