

Sexagesima
20 February, Anno Domini 2022
St. Luke 8:4-15
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. O Lord Jesus Christ give us ears to hear Your Word this day and every day. Do not let the precious seed of Your Word be stolen from our hearts nor let us be filled with sinful pride so that the faith you have once granted withers and dies. Bring us to a right terror of sins and a true and living faith in Your forgiveness that we may turn away from sin and love your will and so bear much fruit. This we ask for the sake of your holy Name. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the parable of our Lord before us this morning is filled with rich comfort and stern warning that we dare not simply pass over without making an honest and thorough examination of our own hearts.

As has been said before, the immediate temptation in this parable is to begin to try to figure out which of the soils we are. We want to make sure that we are the ones with good and honest hearts so that we can comfort ourselves as being good. And, by God's great mercy, you are. You have been made good soil by the seed of Christ's life-giving Word. You have been absolved of your sins and the waters of Holy Baptism continue to nourish and strengthen that which has been planted. But you are not good soil because of anything you have done. Before receiving the life-giving seed of God's Word, your heart was hard, weed-filled waste land of death where there was nothing good.

You see, a good and honest heart is a heart that has been brought to acknowledge there is nothing good in it except what God has put there. A good and honest heart has been brought to confess that there remain great stones of unbelief and sin to be removed and that it truly struggles under the constant assaults of the devil and the world. The good and honest heart knows that it desperately needs the constant rain from heaven to strengthen it and produce true repentance and a true desire to obey the fullness of the Ten Commandments. The good and honest heart prays that the good seed would constantly be cast upon it so that it may be good.

This past Friday and Saturday, at the men's retreat, we studied and discussed the dual dangers of self-righteousness and lawlessness and how easy it is to be led astray in either direction, mindful that both errors bring with them the common end

of damnation. We are probably far more well-versed and on-guard against self-righteousness, though by no means should we imagine that it is not a constant threat to us. A self-righteous person falsely imagines that either he has kept the law or at least that he has kept the law sufficiently to avoid God's righteous wrath. Such a person trusts not in Christ but in himself and in so doing condemns himself to eternal destruction. He hears the Word but he doesn't listen to it or believe it. He may wear all the outer trappings of a Christian but he is a liar and no Christian. A Christian loves EVERY word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, even those that unequivocally condemn his own righteousness.

The self-righteous person may hear the Scriptures, is likely in church very regularly, leads an upstanding and moral life. By every outward measure, you would assume he was the very best of soil. He hears the Word but the devil quickly comes along and steals it from him, convincing him that God's wrath doesn't apply to him because he is better than other men. Therefore he has no use for Christ and the forgiveness of his sins. The self-righteous man does not follow Jesus and ask for more of His Word. He thinks he has already mastered it and has nothing more to learn or gain from God. Quite often, the self-righteous person believes he has something to teach God. He imagines that he is good soil and that because he is good soil, God saved him. He often believes that he knows better than God what is good. When he hears the divine Law, if he hears it, he is not concerned with it. He suffers no terror at the thought of God's judgment - not because he trusts in the Blood of Jesus but because he trusts in himself. But such a person is a deluded fool. He has no root because he has rejected his Savior. When temptation and persecution arise or when the Law does finally strike a nerve, the self-righteous person very quickly withers away and no longer even wears the outward signs of faith.

The other equally dangerous lie that we must be constantly on guard against is lawlessness - the idea that because Christ loves to forgive sinners, then we don't have to fear continuing in our sin. Some even rejoice in their sin and wear it as a badge of honor as though being a worse sinner makes you a better receptacle of God's mercy and love. Some give no thought to the Law at all. They refuse to learn it, to meditate on it, or to examine their own lives in light of it. The lawless man hears the thundering accusation of the Commandments and shrugs his shoulders. "Everyone is a sinner. Who am I to judge and who are you to judge me? We have sinful flesh. We are going to sin. Jesus will simply forgive us. Let us continue in sin so that grace may abound!" The lawless man has no interest in the new obedience of faith that is constantly, daily involved in bitter warfare against the SINFUL desires of the flesh. He sees no need to withhold from his

flesh whatever it wants. He hears the Word but when presented with the pleasures and cares and riches of the world, he puts up no fight. He believes that God does not really take sin seriously because no bolt of lightning flashes from the sky to smite him. Such a man only stores up for himself the righteous wrath of God to be poured out on the Last Day. He foolishly believes that he can both continue in his sin and remain in faith. "I can lust. I can covet. I can let my anger burn. I don't have to pray with my family. I don't NEED to read the Bible. I don't NEED to keep the Sabbath Day."

This is a lie. Anyone who does not struggle against the desires of their flesh to put them to death, anyone who does not hate sin and is not repulsed by even the thought of it, anyone who treats the forgiveness of Christ as an excuse to simply continue in sin, anyone who does not desire and pray for the strength to obey the Ten Commandments and live a life of selfless love, fools only himself and condemns himself, mocking God as a liar and hating His holy Word. There is NEVER an acceptable excuse for your sin. NEVER. Faith bows its head in humility and confesses. Unbelief makes excuses and seeks to justify itself.

A Christian must pray. A Christian must love. A Christian must hear the Word and, like the disciples, chase Jesus down and say "Teach us more, Lord." A Christian must put to death the sinful desires of his flesh. A Christian must repent and receive absolution. A Christian must help his neighbor in need, love his wife and children, rejoice in the blessings God bestows upon his neighbor. And a Christian desires to do these things because God has shown them that they are good. Doing these doesn't save you. These things are done BECAUSE you have been saved. They are the fruits of believing the Word which proclaims you to be righteous on account of the Blood of Jesus who died for you to make full satisfaction for your sins. The one who has heard the Word of God rightly eagerly desires these things and fights relentlessly against his own flesh which desires only evil constantly. And though he is wounded in the fight and even falls, yet, by the strength of Christ and in the joy of Christ's forgiveness he gets up and continues to fight.

By no means is a Christian perfect. In this life you will suffer temptation and doubt and fear and affliction. You will be persecuted, reviled, and hated. Your own flesh will be filled with desires that are too evil to even speak about. You will fall. The difference between the Christian and non-Christian is that the Christian hates his sin and desperately wants to pull up every little weed of sin that he finds in himself because he knows that it is deplorable to God and harmful to himself and those around him. The unbeliever doesn't care about sin believing either he

doesn't have it or embracing it and calling it good. Pray that it may not be so with you.

Which brings us back to Christ's parable. Who among us doesn't have the devil constantly around us using every means at his disposal to rob us of the word of God? "You don't need to pray. You don't have time to read the Bible. You don't need to go to church." Which us of has not heard God's Word and rejoiced only to be immediately brought into times of suffering and affliction where that joy is turned to sorrow and dismay and our faith begins to wither? Who among us has not allowed the pleasures and cares and riches of the world not keep us from prayer and meditation on the Scriptures? Who hasn't felt the pull of worldly commitments seek to draw us away from gathering with the body of Christ in the Divine Service?

You are good soil. By His Almighty Word Christ has made it so. But that only stirs up everyone who hates God and His Word and His children. The truly Christian response to this parable, the right way to hear it, is to see each of these soils within yourself and repent and cry out to God for His Holy Spirit. Your enemies are constantly swirling around you seeking to convince you either that you have no need of the Word because you are a good enough person to please God (unlike that guy over there) or that you have no need of the Word because God doesn't really care about your sin and will forgive you anyway. You are living in a foolish delusion if you don't believe this to be true. God has told you. Don't doubt Him. You absolutely NEED the Word of God. You need the gracious sower to recklessly sow His Word into your ears because it is the Word which makes you good, which teaches you what is good and right and true and beautiful and holy. It is the Word that brings you to the death of repentance and the new life of faith in Christ. You need this seed daily because of the temptations that surround you on every side, within and without. Without the seed, without hearing and constantly seeking after more, you will perish. Just as children live by the food that their parents set before them, so we, children of the heavenly Father, live by the rich feast that He sets before us - His Word of forgiveness and truth; His Word which washed away all of our sin and turned hard, cracked, dry soil into fertile ground that would yield the heavenly fruits of faith and love; His Word which fills the Holy Supper of Christ's Body and Blood, pledging to us the complete remission of all our sins and the resurrection to eternal life. It is by this very Word that your Old Adam is daily put to death. It is by this Word that you are raised up out of death to new life. It is by this Word that you are strengthened against the devil's relentless assaults. It is this Word which exposes the works of darkness for the death that they are and gives you strength to avoid them. It is this Word which

takes away the guilt of all your sins and raises you up to fight again. It is this Word which is your great weapon that slays death and the devil and which shields you in battle.

Take care then how you hear. Be an active and engaged hearer. Be a humble hearer who says “Amen” to every Word which Christ has given to us in Holy Scripture. Don’t arrogantly listen to Christ only that you might trap Him in His words. Don’t be a disinterested hearer who allows nothing more than the sounds of the words to strike your eardrum but doesn’t let them sink deep into your heart. Instead, pray that the Lord would stir up in you a fervent desire to hear and love His Word. Pray that by His Word, the Lord would root out and expose sin wherever it is lurking in your heart and produce an abundant harvest of righteousness and good works that are pleasing in His sight. Like the disciples ask that Jesus would teach you to understand and to treasure the Words of His mouth above all the riches and pleasures of this world which are nothing. May God grant us all His Holy Spirit so that we might be diligent hearers of the Word which He has graciously sown among us this day.

In the Name of +Jesus.