

Isaiah 55:10-13

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Series A, Proper 10)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:12-17; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

A Word-Of Promise and Power!

July 12, 2020

“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. “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

People can be so good at saying things, but not so great at doing things. There was a time when someone could say, “You have my word on it”, and that meant something. To say that someone was as good as his word meant that you could count on him to do what he said he would do. But in today's world a simple oral promise isn't worth any more than the paper on which it is printed. We take our car in for service, and the mechanic says that the car will be ready today, but when we go to pick it up, the work is still not finished. We become aggravated with politicians who make all sorts of election promises, and who talk a great game, but when it comes right down to it are unable or unwilling to do what they say they are going to do. Parents can be like that, telling their children one thing and doing another, what we might call the “do as I say, not as I do” attitude. Even at church, we can talk about all the great things we want to do, or which we want to see happen around the church, but when it comes right down to it, we would often rather talk about those things than actually have to do them. But talk is cheap. It is easy to say things, but it takes a whole lot more to put our words into action.

In this world filled with empty rhetoric and vain promises, wouldn't it be nice if there was someone we could count on to do the things that he said he would do; to truly be as good as his word? Well, there is someone who is truly as good as His word. That someone, of course, is the True God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God says some wonderful things to us in His word. He speaks of peace, of love and joy. He promises life and forgiveness to those who believe in Him. He tells us of the blessings He wants to give us, and of the hope we can have in Him. God has great promises for you, for me, and for all people! But what good would it be if all these things were just talk; just empty promises without any action behind them? Where would that leave us? It would leave us without any reason to believe. It would leave us hopeless and helpless, not only in this life, but also in view of eternity itself. Thankfully, as Isaiah tells us in our text today, God is a God of His word, a God who does what He says. We are told: *“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.”* God's Word is a word of promise and a Word of power. When God speaks, things are going to happen! When we hear Him speak to us in His word, we can say, “thank heavens!” God is at work, to accomplish His good plans, and to work for the good of the people He loves.

Tomorrow morning our virtual VBS programme, *God's Promises for Me* will be live on YouTube. Students will take a wonderful journey through God's promises in His Word: the promises to send a Saviour; His promise to hear and answer our prayers. They will hear God's promises to strengthen and protect us, and of course, to forgive us and give us life with Him through Jesus, our Saviour. But again, all these things would be meaningless if God wasn't as good as His Word or if He didn't have the power to do what He says. That is why these words of the Lord to Isaiah are so important. God reminds Isaiah of what happens when the rain and snow comes down to water the earth. They don't just fall without effect. Before the rains are dried up, they water the earth so that vegetation sprouts and springs forth. The fact that I have to cut my lawn every four days right now is a testimony to this truth. God says His Word works the same way. It goes forth with a purpose. It does what God sends it to do. The psalmist reminds us: *“For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”* (Psalm 33:9, ESV) God's Word always—always—does what God sends it to do. God is always as good as His Word of promise and life.

As a pastor, I find great comfort and encouragement in these words. After all, the only real tool pastors have at their disposal for the work of ministry is the Word of God. We look to the word to give us the guidance, the help and the strength we need for our lives. We look to that Word to be the hope and help for you, the dear people He loves. God's Word brings comfort in the midst of the deepest sorrow. It brings hope to hopeless hearts; it is our source of strength in weakness. God's word can

create, or it can destroy; it can forgive, and it can pronounce judgment. It can do these things because it is a powerful word. In the book of Hebrews we are told: ***“For the word of God is living and active”***. (Hebrews 4:12, ESV) That is what God promises in our text: ***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.***

Thanks be to God for this wonderful promise! God is at work in His Word, doing what He says He will do. His word is an active word, a word of promise and power, bringing wonderful blessings to our lives! When the world seems to be too much for us, when it seems to be getting the best of us, His word says to us: ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33, ESV) When we are afraid: afraid of what lies ahead, afraid of what might be, we have His word: ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*** ***So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”*** (Hebrews 13:5–6, ESV) When we sorrow, He promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes. Even death loses its power over us when Jesus, the Living Word says: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*** (John 11:25–26, ESV)

But the greatest promise and power of His word comes as that word transforms dying and condemned people like you and me into forgiven people alive in Christ. Think of the simple words of John 3:16: ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16, ESV) There are just 24 words in that verse, but how many lives have been changed forever by the impact of those 24 words? Those words actually do what they promise: they bring God’s love and life to those who hear them, as the Holy Spirit works faith through those words. Like every word which comes from God they accomplish the very thing He has sent them to do. They lead lost and condemned people from an eternity of torment to the joy of life with God through faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

When Jesus tells us the parable of the seed and the soils in the Gospel lesson today, there is never a problem with the seed, which Jesus calls ***“the word of the kingdom”*** (Matthew 13:19, ESV) That word is the Gospel, the word that tells us that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world. In fact, the apostle John tells us: ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** (John 1:1, ESV) Jesus *is* the Word. He is the living Word, coming forth from the Father to do what needs to be done for us. Christ, the Living Word says: ***“Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.”*** (Hebrews 10:7, ESV) That will wasn’t easy. It was the Father’s will to give His Son on that horrible cross to bear in His body the sins of all people, including your sins and my sins. Jesus knew how heavy that burden was. He even asked that it be taken from Him. Yet He confidently prayed: ***“Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”*** (Luke 22:42, ESV)

The Living Word always accomplishes what God sent Him to do. His death on the cross was not in vain. He died for all. He paid the price for our sin. The Word also declared the glory of the resurrection, and so He destroys sin, death and the grave as He rises again. We have many reasons to know and believe what the world refuses to believe—that Jesus is alive. If there were no other reason than that God said it in His Word, we know it is true because God’s Word always does what God promises.

God’s promises for you and me have their fulness in Christ. It is because of Christ that God can assure Isaiah: ***“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”*** Everything changes for us through the Word of God—the Living Word, Jesus Christ! What sin has harmed is healed in Christ’s death and resurrection. The fears, uncertainties and worries of this world give way to hope, to faith and to life. God is as good as His Word. God is His Word—the Word of power; the Word of forgiveness; yes, the Word of life forever.

Talk can be cheap. We may not always live up to our words. Fortunately, God is never like that. When He speaks, His Word does exactly what God wants to do. We may not always understand what it is that God seeks to accomplish through His word, but we can be sure that when He speaks, things will happen as He has planned, and they will always work for the good of the people He loves. You have His Word on it. Amen.