

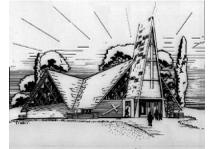


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Sunday Sexagesimae 2016

*The Word of God is alive and
powerful!*

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Hebrews 4, 9–15:

- **9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,
- **10** for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.
- **11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.
- **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, so that Your Word will cut through to our deepest soul and spirit, to convict us of our sin and to convince us of Your saving Rest. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

- Today God speaks to us about the effectiveness of His Word. The passage we heard as our Epistle Reading for today and sermon text is adamant, speaks with sharp words about the sharpness of the Word of God. It is not blunt. It is not insignificant, some “rantings of pre-historic people” as many claim these days. It is absolutely effective. The Isaiah word for today confirms this. The Word of God is like rain which comes down and does what it came to do. It does not return having accomplished nothing.
- The Word of God is alive and full of energy, effective and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, which cuts both ways. It pierces and penetrates dividing the soul and it even reaches down to the very deepest point of our spirit. It cuts through joints and deeper, what's inside the bones, the marrow. It is able to reach and penetrate where nothing else can penetrate. It discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- No creature is able to be hidden from His sight. All are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. There is no hidden thought or marrow, neither in our heart nor in our body. We are completely see- through,

completely naked, that is all our thoughts and secret desires are exposed and known to Jesus Christ our Lord!

- As this is true, how does this then fit with what we have heard in the parable, that only roughly a fourth of the seed that was scattered came up and brought fruit. Only the seed that fell in the good ground sprouted and brought fruit hundredfold. We heard in Hebrews, that the Jews also heard the Word of Christ, but they didn't believe Him.
- And if we heard closely what was happening when Jesus addressed the crowd. He was speaking in a parable to them. That is, the crowd never heard the explanation of the parable. They left without asking Him. Jesus let them go.
- It was only when His disciples asked Him what He meant that He explained it to them. He was speaking about the mystery of the kingdom of heaven which was only to be given to them. How does this all fit together?
- As Jesus is the Word Himself who speaks the word, we want to hear again what He said to His disciples: "**11** *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. **14** And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **15** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*"
- Why did the disciples of Jesus ask Jesus to explain the parable to them. Why did they urgently need to know more, whilst the crowd was happy with the parable alone?
- What is disturbing about this message of the kingdom of God? Or are you comfortable with it? Isn't it disturbing to know that only some, only a fourth of the people who hear the Word of God keep it and bear fruit? Jesus is speaking of good soil, a good heart, an honest heart which will hear the Word and hold it! Isn't the disturbing question hanging in the room, as we hear these words, where am I? What soil am I? How can I be certain, that I am good soil, that I have a good heart, an honest one too? Is that who I am, truly now?

• If I would scrutinize my life of the past week and check it against the commandments of God, as Jesus explains them in His sermon on the mount. It is not only what I do wrong that is sin in God's eyes, also what I think wrongly. And even deeper, sin starts in my deepest desires, secret as they are. I might be able to force my body not to kill the person who harms me, or attacks my character- words are sometimes more hurtful than physical pain- but what about my desires against such a person who stabs me like that? Won't I put the worst construction on such a person's words if I discuss it with someone else? So, is this a good heart? Am I good soil?

• And when you hear the Word of Christ, like this parable, like its explanation, don't you maybe sometimes think, that He is a bit harsh, or even unjust, that His Word is not as effective as He says it is. Sometimes we think that God should do things a bit faster, we start to doubt the effectiveness of His Word in special cases. Is that what good soil looks like? Am I not more like those other soils, where the fruit is not there or where my fruit is choked by all the sorrows and worries of life- there are so many these days- all seems to fall apart!

• Again, is that what good soil looks like? Is that who I am? So, where is my certainty that I am a participant of Jesus' disciples? Where is my hundredfold fruit in any case?

• Dear member of Christ, who listens: Do you realise, that Christ is dissecting your heart, is discerning your thoughts, your deepest desires with His Word. He is cutting deep deep down and He exposes and opens your inner life to you- and it doesn't look good. There is nowhere to hide, nowhere to escape, as you hear Him: Your thoughts and desires are in deepest surgery, yes He inflicts a wound in your innermost being, a deadly wound.

• But, this is good news, not bad news. This is great, because He does something about our evil deep deep down in us. It has to come to light. What is secret must come to the light, and then when it is exposed it loses its hold on us. It is not my secret alone. Jesus cut right through it with His Word of Truth. Yes, it is true, I am not good soil, by my own doing, by nature.

• And yet here you are hearing Him out, allowing Him to dissect your innermost being. Yes, I am like those other soils which would give no fruit at all, if it hadn't been for Jesus. Jesus is with His disciples and they are with Him. Hebrews carries on like this [verse 14ff]: *“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our*

confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

• In this time of need where our hearts are lying dissected before God, by the Word of Christ we run to our High-priest Jesus. Yes, we are not good soil by nature, but Jesus is, and He can make us good soil. We can receive mercy from Him, which will make our heart merciful. He can make us new. He can give us a good heart which will not only hear His Word, but also keep it in our hearts. He is here to help us, to get us to hear Him with our hearts, so that His desires will become our desires.

• Yes, He is cutting through our deepest heart, but He has the power to give us a new heart. And as He has loved the world and gave His Life for them, He gives us of His love so that we can even start to see our worst enemies with a new heart. They also need Christ. Why don't you use the conflict as an opportunity to share Christ's forgiving love with them. And if they ignore you, rely on the fact that Christ's Word is effective as it has been effective with you. You don't need to win the argument. And if they come to repentance share the Gospel with them that in with and through Jesus your sins are forgiven. Mercy is abound for the bad soil to be made good soil through His death on the cross.

• This is good news! That is one operation we should learn to love, the operation on our heart by Jesus. He is genuine good soil. He means it good with you!

• Praise be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.