**AS WE GATHER**

The Word works! The Word of God is our only source of everlasting life. Through Isaiah, God explains that His Word is as effective as rain causing growth in plants. As David writes poetically, His care causes all the trees of the field to clap their hands. And the Word will work in our lives so that we will “go out in joy and be led forth in peace,” as Isaiah puts it. Indeed, Jesus, the Word in the flesh, succeeded in giving us peace and joy by rising victorious over sin, death, and the power of the devil. As a result, Paul explains in the Epistle, we are God’s adopted children, calling out to Him, “Abba, Father.” But there is work for us to do! As we let the Word work through us, we can expect that, in spite of opposition of all sorts from the world, if we but hear and understand, we will certainly bear fruit for our heavenly Father.

**INVOCATION**

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People: Amen.**

**CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

Pastor: Our help is in the name of the Lord,

**People: who made heaven and earth.**

Pastor: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,

**People: and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**

Pastor: In the today’s Epistle, Paul reminds us that “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Let us therefore go to our gracious heavenly Father, confessing our sins.

*Silence for reflection on God’s Word and for self-examination.*

Pastor: In the Old Testament Reading, God promises, “My word . . . shall not return to Me empty; it shall accomplish . . . and shall succeed.”

**People: But we do not trust You in all things. We have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Forgive us, heavenly Father.**

Pastor: Then God tells us, “You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.”

**People: But we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. Hear us, free us, and lead us in paths pleasing to You, heavenly Father.**

Pastor: In the Gospel, our Lord explains that “the one who hears the word and understands it . . . bears fruit.” By the grace of God, we believe and understand that Jesus, the Word of God in the flesh, succeeded in destroying death and rising victorious for us. For His sake, God forgives us and uses us to bear fruit for Him. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. May the Word planted inside you produce a great harvest for our gracious Lord.

**People: Amen. Thanks be to God!**

**HYMN:** “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” *LSB* 790

1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation!
 Let all who hear
 Now to His temple draw near,
Joining in glad adoration!

2 Praise to the Lord, who o’er all things is wondrously reigning
And, as on wings of an eagle, uplifting, sustaining.
 Have you not seen
 All that is needful has been
Sent by His gracious ordaining?

3 Praise to the Lord, who has fearfully, wondrously, made you,
Health has bestowed and, when heedlessly falling, has stayed you.
 What need or grief
 Ever has failed of relief?
Wings of His mercy did shade you.

4 Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you;
Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
 Ponder anew
 What the Almighty can do
As with His love He befriends you.

5 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
 Let the Amen
 Sound from His people again;
Gladly forever adore Him!

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**KYRIE**

Pastor: O Lord,

**People: have mercy on us.**

Pastor: O Christ,

**People: have mercy on us.**

Pastor: O Lord,

**People: have mercy on us, and give us Your peace. Amen.**

**SALUTATION AND PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Pastor: Let us pray, Gracious God, who has given us this good earth in which to live and who sends rain and sun to cause plants to produce fruit and grain for harvest, continue to send Your life-giving Word to us so that we resist the cares of this world and return to You a harvest of new sons and daughters, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**People: Amen.**

**HYMN OF PRAISE:** “Thy Strong Word” *LSB* 578

1 Thy strong word did cleave the darkness;
 At Thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank Thee,
 While Thine ordered seasons run.
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Alleluia without end!

2 Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness,
 Dark as night and deep as death,
Broke the light of Thy salvation,
 Breathed Thine own life-breathing breath.
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Alleluia without end!

3 Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous;
 Bright with Thine own holiness,
Glorious now, we press toward glory,
 And our lives our hopes confess.
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Alleluia without end!

4 From the cross Thy wisdom shining
 Breaketh forth in conqu’ring might;
From the cross forever beameth
 All Thy bright redeeming light.
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
 Alleluia without end!

5 Give us lips to sing Thy glory,
 Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,
 Mouths to speak Thy holy name.
Alleluia, alleluia!
 May the light which Thou dost send
Fill our songs with alleluias,
 Alleluias without end!

6 God the Father, light-creator,
 To Thee laud and honor be.
To Thee, Light of Light begotten,
 Praise be sung eternally.
Holy Spirit, light-revealer,
 Glory, glory be to Thee.
Mortals, angels, now and ever
 Praise the holy Trinity!

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**OLD TESTAMENT READING** *Isaiah 55:10–13*

10“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,

11so 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.

12“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.

13Instead 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.”

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**EPISTLE** *Romans 8:12–17*

12So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 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.

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**VERSE** *Isaiah 40:8*

Pastor: Alleluia. The grass withers, the flower fades,

**People: but the word of our God will stand forever. Alleluia.**

**HOLY GOSPEL** *Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the thirteenth chapter.

**People: Glory to You, O Lord.**

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. 4And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. 5Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, 6but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. 7Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

9He who has ears, let him hear.”

…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. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. 22As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 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.”

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**People: Praise to You, O Christ.**

**HYMN OF THE DAY** **“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”** *LSB 686*

1 Come, Thou Fount of ev’ry blessing,
 Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
 Call for songs of loudest praise.
While the hope of endless glory
 Fills my heart with joy and love,
Teach me ever to adore Thee;
 May I still Thy goodness prove.

2 Here I raise my Ebenezer,
 Hither by Thy help I’ve come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
 Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
 Wand’ring from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
 Interposed His precious blood.

3 Oh, to grace how great a debtor
 Daily I’m constrained to be;
Let that grace now like a fetter
 Bind my wand’ring heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
 Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
 Seal it for Thy courts above.

**SERMON**

**Jesus’ parable of the sower is one of his most basic stories and deserves our undivided attention. Its theme is the proclamation of God’s Word and people’s responses to it, as we’re told in the second part of our reading when Jesus explains it to the disciples.**

**The explanation of the parable begins by telling us what the seed that falls on the path and is eaten by birds points to: “The evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart.” When the Word of God is proclaimed, it never takes root in some people because “the evil one” steals it. That’s the typical work of evil — negative, anti-creation, death and destruction.**

**The parable’s theme is important, but we can’t just talk about it in a vacuum.**

**The sower goes out to sow in the real world, a world in which terrorists’ bombs kill and maim people, a world that echoes with the cries of the injured and mourning for the dead. It’s a world in which the rich often exploit the poor, and in which some have more than enough while others go hungry. In the real world, some people are discriminated against because of their race or religion or sexual orientation or where they’re from. What does it mean for the seed to be sown in a world in which such things happen? Maybe the best place to start is with what Jesus says about evil.**

            By “the evil one,” Jesus means the devil. But it’s just as well that this rather neutral term is used here. The phrase “the evil one” doesn’t call up for us the familiar caricatures of devils in red suits with pitchforks, or stories in which the devil seems an interesting guy with a lot of depth. Instead we’re confronted just with “evil” — with what those old stories and pictures of the devil try to express. The evil one opposes God’s work and tries to destroy it. God is love and evil is hate. God creates, freely giving life to all that exists, and evil can only destroy. The devil is finally not very interesting because he can’t do anything interesting. The German poet Goethe called the devil “the spirit who always denies.” Evil can only say, “No.”

            But there *is* good done in the world, on small scales and large. Parents do the best they can to raise children and try to teach by word and example how to treat others. People donate to food pantries, work at soup kitchens and give money to charitable organizations to help those in need. Teachers work longer hours than many people realize to educate their students. Police officers and firefighters risk their lives to protect the people of their communities. Leaders of nations try to do what is best for their own citizens and strive for good relations with other countries, working with their leaders to solve common problems. That’s quite a contrast with terrorists planting their bombs or drug dealers making profits from the addiction and death of others.

            But it’s too easy to see evil only in others — terrorists, serial killers or sexual predators. In them we can see that destructive, anti-creative rage at work and congratulate ourselves that we’re not like that. But if we think about our own reactions at stressful times in our lives — the hurtful word that didn’t have to be spoken but was, just because it *would* hurt, or the object smashed to vent our anger — we can see the seeds of the same destructiveness. We’re not immune from evil; sometimes we even welcome it. Our reactions to particularly hateful crimes may show that. “Such people don’t deserve to live!” we may cry — and perhaps begin to be like those we condemn.

            So what are we to do in this world in which terrible things can happen? It would be easy to begin making lists of good, positive, creative actions that we intend to do. But Jesus tells us to start with something more basic. We need to listen — not first of all to suggestions for good deeds, but to the creative Word of God that can change and renew lives. As Jesus said in concluding the parable, “Let anyone with ears listen!”

            People who are not Christians, those who don’t hear the Word or don’t accept it, can do things that are good. Sad to say, sometimes they do more good than those who go to church. We can call it “natural law” or, with C.S. Lewis, “the tao” (a Chinese term meaning “the way”).1 Somehow God has given all people some sense that murder, theft and adultery are wrong and that concern for the welfare of others is best for peace and justice in society. (That does not mean that people always act that way!)

            But God wants more than just lack of conflict among people. We are called to know God, to be in communion with him and in genuine community with one another. And that comes by receiving the life-giving and faith-giving word of God.

            The seed that is sown, Jesus says, is “the word of the kingdom.” It’s what Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry when he said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”2And it is a proclamation — not just a piece of information, but news! It is the Word of which God says in Isaiah, “It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”3 The seed that is sown is the Word by which God spoke the universe into being in the beginning. It is Jesus Christ, the Word who was with God in the beginning and through whom all things were made. And the Holy Spirit works with the Word to bring forth faith in those who hear, so that works truly pleasing to God are done.

            So if we are to be creative rather than destructive, if we are to do good rather than evil, we’re called first of all simply to hear that Word, to be open to its creative and transforming power. If we expect to do good things, we must first become good people, and that comes about through the creative power of God. When we hear the good news of Jesus Christ, we encounter him with his life-changing power and are called to a new type of life conformed to the pattern of Jesus Christ.

            Jesus insists that we listen. There is evil in the world that opposes the Word and tries to keep new life from taking root. It is easy to be content with a superficial faith, but such a faith doesn’t hold up in times of difficulty. If your relationship with God is only a Sunday morning thing, you’re likely to get entangled with other concerns that choke the growth in the new life to which you are called. That’s why the command is simple — listen and keep on listening with faith and the understanding that grows out of faith.

            **Those who listen and come to faith will be guided into the kinds of actions that are in accord with God’s creative purpose for the world, each person with the talents and abilities which God has given. For while our task to begin with is the passive one of hearing the Word, we are then called to action. We are, as the parable puts it, to bring forth an abundant harvest.**

**Theologian Philip Hefner describes human beings as “created co-creators.”4 We are creatures of God, with no claim to divinity. But God graciously calls us to be instruments of the divine creative work, agents through whom creation is protected and nurtured toward the future that God desires. We are to be creators rather than destroyers. Even if we must sometimes do the hard work of demolition, as when a surgeon amputates a limb, it is to be for the healing and the ultimate well-being of the world.**

**The work for which the Word motivates and empowers us is to be Christ-like work. In the Gospel of John, Jesus set out as clearly as possible the difference between the actions that characterize evil and his own work. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”5**

**He’s the one whose seed we should let grow in our hearts.**

**CONFESSION OF FAITH: Apostles’ Creed**

C **I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life + everlasting. Amen.**

**PRAYER OF THE CHURCH** *Psalm 65:2–5, 9, 11*

Almighty God, hear the prayers of Your people, grant to us all things needful and beneficial, and keep from us all things harmful.

Holy Lord, mighty God, You are the strength of the hills and the hope of the ends of the earth. Give to our hearts Your perfect peace, that we may not be anxious nor live in fear but rest all our hopes, dreams and desires upon Your merciful goodness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, You send forth water upon the earth, that it may bring forth abundant fruit and feed our bodies with all that we need. Help us to be wise and faithful in the use of the rich bounty of the earth, that the poor may be supplied and that we never fail to give thanks to You for all You have given us for this body and life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, Your Word will not return to You empty but will accomplish Your purpose in sending it. By Your Holy Spirit, make our hearts good soil for Your Word to be planted, that we may give evidence of a sturdy faith and show forth in our lives the good works You have called us to do. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, Your Spirit accompanies the witness of Your people who speak Your Word before the world. Grant success to the missionary and mission planter and to every pastor and church worker, that those who hear may believe and those who believe may bear the good fruit of faith in their lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, You know how weak and frail we are. Give to those afflicted in mind, body or soul the fullness of Your healing grace, that according to Your will they may be restored to health. Hear us for all those suffering or recovering from the pandemic’s ravages, for those who have requested our prayers *[especially \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]*, and for those we name in our hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, You have granted us great riches and gifts. Keep our hearts from being overburdened by the things of this mortal life, whether in time of plenty or in time of want. Deliver us from persecution and sustain us from all tribulation, that our hearts may ever be fixed upon the true treasure of Your grace. Accept the tithes and offerings we bring as part of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all Your goodness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, Your Word endures forever. Keep us from being tossed about by every wind of change and chance, and help us to endure upon the firm foundation of Your Word and Sacraments. Prepare us so that we may worthily receive the Lord’s body and blood and be kept by this blessed communion toward the day when we shall be reunited with all who have gone before and dwell in Your presence forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In Him, with Him and through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is Yours, almighty Father, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER** *Matthew 6:9–13*

**People:** **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

**CONCLUDING COLLECT**

Pastor: O holy and most merciful God, You have taught us the way of Your commandments. We implore You to pour out Your grace into our hearts. Cause it to bear fruit in us that, being ever mindful of Your mercies and Your laws, we may always be directed to Your will and daily increase in love toward You and one another. Enable us to resist all evil and to live a godly life. Help us to follow the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to walk in His steps until we shall possess the kingdom that has been prepared for us in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**People: Amen.**

**BENEDICTION**

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace. *Numbers 6:24–26*

**People: Amen.**

HYMN: “Sent Forth by God's Blessing”  *LSB 643*

1 Sent forth by God’s blessing,
 Our true faith confessing,
The people of God from His dwelling take leave.
 The Supper is ended.
 O now be extended
The fruits of this service in all who believe.
 The seed of His teaching,
 Receptive souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for God and for all.
 His grace did invite us,
 His love shall unite us
To work for God’s kingdom and answer His call.

2 With praise and thanksgiving
 To God ever-living,
The tasks of our ev’ryday life we will face.
 Our faith ever sharing,
 In love ever caring,
Embracing His children of each tribe and race.
 With Your feast You feed us,
 With Your light now lead us;
Unite us as one in this life that we share.
 Then may all the living
 With praise and thanksgiving
Give honor to Christ and His name that we bear.

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**DISMISSAL**

Pastor: Go in peace, serve the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God!**

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