

LECTIONARY 15 A 2011

Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:9-14; Matthew 13:1-9

July 13, 2011 - Wednesday

Central, Anchorage

WORD WORK

What is God's Word for? For what purpose? To what end? If God's Word does what it says, then why doesn't God just speak peace and justice, kindness and community for our whole world and make it so?

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered 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 succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. God spoke all of creation into being. By the breath of God's word it was so. You've heard me mention before that in Hebrew the word for word, i.e., *ṛBd*, means both word and deed, word and work. Speech has power. Words are potent. Were I to say, "I love you with all my heart," something mighty is happening. Likewise, were I to say, "I can't stand you. Go away. Leave me alone." A different kind of something, but just as mighty, is happening. The old jingle: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me" isn't always true, is it?

Words have power, but words can be mere words, clichés and empty platitudes. We become suspicious of a politician full of promises but with no follow-through. We don't believe him. His words lose power. We do not trust what the used-car salesman tells us. Some folks make promises with good intentions, but they can't seem to do what they say. Whereas, other folks are as good as their word. God is as good as his word. Are we as good as our word?

God's word is good, but God's word loses power when we fail to hear it and heed it. The wondrous words of scripture, of the great prophet Isaiah, of the apostle Paul and of Jesus the Christ are nothing more than print on paper or a dying sound when we fail to respond. Thus, Jesus says, "Let anyone with ears listen!" Listen. Hear. Lend an ear. Pay attention. Harken to the voice of Jesus, to the word of God.

Martin Luther called this place of assembly, this place of divine worship, a "mouth house." Here, God addresses us, greets, welcomes, encounters us with the breath and voice of speech. Here, God beckons us and woos us with words of love and promise. How do we respond? Do we truly hear? This is indeed a fundamental question of faith. It, also, is a fundamental concern for the preacher. I may strive, through study and prayer and an occasional clever turn of phrase, to lend some insight to God's word for us, but in the end it is God's Word that speaks with authority and to which we all must listen with awakened ears.

Open your ears, O faithful people,
open your ears to hear God's Word.
Open your hearts, O royal priesthood,
God has come to you.

They who have ears to hear the message,
they who have ears, now let them hear;
they who would learn the way of wisdom,
let them hear God's Word.

Since we are God's people, our task, our calling, is to hear, trust, celebrate, proclaim and enact the Word of God—here, within this community where we are made Christ's body through water and word; here, within this community where every Lord's day we are re-membered as the body of Christ through bread and wine; and also from here where we are sent for the sake of the world. Here, God's Word is sown, freely and abundantly scattered, that within, among and beyond us it may sprout, grow, and bear fruit, thus "giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater." Here, is where Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed happens, among us and through us! In this "mouth house" God is speaking, calling us to serve as agents, as ambassadors, of God's Word.

Listen, listen, God is calling
through the Word inviting,
offering forgiveness,
comfort and joy.

In the poetry of the prophet Isaiah, all of creation responds.

You shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
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 be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

What is this word for which our world hungers and thirsts? From the prophet Isaiah, "Thus says the LORD: maintain justice and do what is right." "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, . . . to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?" "If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday." "Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." "Beat your swords into plowshares, your spears into pruning hooks, and study war no more."

God is as good as his word, so then let us listen. God's Word is good and true in Jesus, so then let us pay attention. As we hear and heed God's Word, so we give thanks for the good and gracious Word of God. God is as good as his Word. May we be good soil, so that, indeed, in our living the Light of God dawns on a weary world.

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.