

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 30, 2017
Isaiah 55:10, 11
The Word is Never Devoid of Results
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Take away moisture and what do you have? You have a barren landscape. I was reminded of this when we were in the southwest last week. Where there was rain and snow and irrigation the earth was green and fruitful. Otherwise, it was brown. The earth cannot produce anything by itself. God must water the earth so it can accomplish his purpose of its bearing seed and food.

This is also true of God's Word. God accomplishes his purposes in our lives with that Word. By the Word of God we are as the Psalmist says in Psalm 1 like trees planted by streams of water that bear fruit in its season. Without God's Word we are desolate, lifeless, and fruitless.

The Word is Never Devoid of Results. God sends the rain and snow that bring results. So God's Word accomplishes his purpose.

We need to look at the context of Isaiah's prophecy for a better understanding of it. In verse 9, we hear the LORD God say, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

We do not and cannot understand what God does or does not do in our lives or in the lives of others. We always must look at those things through the subjective lens of our own interpretation and understanding. As a result, our conclusions are uncertain in the least, and dead wrong at the most. In contrast to that subjective look stands the objective sure Word of God. It says what it means and means what it says clearly and powerfully.

Luther observed that whether or not we understand the ways of the Lord, we can trust that his Word is true and will do what it says. Last week there was a horrific car crash in southern Illinois. It took the lives of a pregnant mother and her three children aged 18 months to six years. They were members of one of our congregations. Please pray for the young husband and father who lost his family. Please pray for our pastors who will minister to him.

There are several practical applications here for us. Our families are great gifts from God. We need to treat them as such and not take one another for granted. Life can change in an instant and end in an instant. There are no answers on earth as to why such a thing happened. The Word of God tells us about God's ways and our trying to understand them as I just read. And, in the midst of all that uncertainty, pain and grief the Word of God also stands as the only power to give some comfort and hope. And it will.

When God sends rain and snow to water the earth, the earth does what its Creator wants it to do. It will produce seed the farmer can sow into his fields to produce a crop. It will produce bread, food to feed many people. When we look around as we travel this summer we see lots of corn, and soybeans and wheat and other crops. We go to farmers' markets and see the abundance of fruit the earth has produced; not to its own glory but to God's glory for he is the one who sent the rain and snow.

The Word of God is never devoid of results. Just as his Word sends the rain and snow, so his Word will send comfort and hope to those who are weary and burdened. This weariness and burden may come as guilt over our sins, or through the crosses the Lord places on us. Just as the

earth cannot do anything by itself neither can we. God's Word accomplishes his purposes and gives success.

God's Word is a means of grace that gives us the forgiveness of our sins Jesus earned for us on his cross. It gives us new life that is Jesus' new life in his resurrection. It gives us eternal life as Jesus' delivers us and our Christian loved ones into heaven. The Word of God enables us to bear our crosses.

God's purpose for his Word is to have his kingdom come and his will be done. Luther is helpful again as he wrote, "The building and promotion of the church is not the result of our works but of the Word of God which we preach. For it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do." The Word of God will bring people to saving faith in Christ. The Word of God will strengthen the faith of those who believe. The Word calls us into the kingdom of God and preserves us in faith. The Word enables his name to be holy among us and his kingdom to come through our preaching.

Our forgiveness of sins and our faith in Christ are not to our glory. We cannot produce those fruits any more than the earth can produce fruits by itself. God waters the earth and pours out his Word on us. Then, then the fruit comes to God's glory.

I learned this lesson well watching the German-Russian wheat farmers in my first congregation on the central plateau of Washington State. They sowed the seed then waited for the rain and the snow to produce a crop. And it did, as rows of combines cut the wheat at harvest time.

I see the Word of God produce the fruits of repentance. I see God's Word comfort the mourning and strengthen the weak and weary. One of the proofs that God's Word is God's Word is that it works. We all have experienced the power of the Word. Mainly in the fact that we still are Christians so many years after our baptisms by the power of the gospel in Word and sacrament over the years. That is not to our glory but to God be the glory.

God accomplishes his purposes with the Word and brings success to the Word. Paul recognized that we are not sufficient of ourselves for the work but our sufficiency is from God. We have the Word he has revealed to us. Our window reminds us in the Latin letters that "the Word of God remains forever." That does not mean just in duration but also in its changeless authority and power to produce what our Lord wants.

This is the objective truth on which we stand rather than the subjective lens through which to look and try to get what God is doing. The Word is never devoid of results. Those results are God's good and gracious will for us, sinners whom God loved so much that he sent his only and only Son to redeem us and then called us to be his children. Amen. <SDG>