

Season after PENTECOST

Prayer

Collect of the Day

Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 65:(1-8) 9-13 (antiphon v. 5)

Isaiah 55:10-13

Romans 8:12-17

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 577

Other Hymns – 545 (OT), 725

(E), 584 (G), 586 (G), 923

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.**

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Holy God, mighty Lord, You have given power to the nations and those who govern to act for the good of Your people. Bless our prime minister, the parliament, our premier and all those elected and appointed to lead us, that justice may prevail and Your people may be free to live at peace with all people. 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 the blessed Sacrament of Your Son's body and blood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

“Hearing Affects Living”

I think we would all agree that ‘hearing affects living.’ Maybe it’s too simply stated, but that’s why we have schools today. We send our children to the classroom in order to hear about literature, mathematics, science, history, geography and many more subjects because that knowledge may assist them as they make their way through life. And while children are at school, or maybe more so in their play time as they interact with their peers, they hear from them both good and bad things that will affect how they live. Hopefully, our children and grandchildren learn from us in the home the kind of language that is appropriate and the good manners they should display inside and outside of the home. The same is also true in our spiritual lives – communicating to our family the Christian faith that we profess . . . a faith that maybe was taught to us by our parents and grandparents.

Yes, ‘hearing affects living’ as we believe, teach and confess that it is only the powerful Word of God that can create faith in our hearts and good in our lives. The Old Testament Reading appointed for today attests to that – as the rains come and cause crops to grow, so God assures us, *“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.”* The more we hear God’s Word here in church, the more we study it in Bible Class, the more we meditate upon it in our personal devotions, the more it will influence for the better our behaviour and life. And do you know what? As God’s Word does its work, our churches are all growing, full to capacity, standing room only! Our pastors are so busy teaching and visiting that the strain is beginning to show in their lives!

No? That’s not happening, is it? Check the most recent statistics of our Lutheran Church—Canada, and you will discover that huge, unbridled growth in our congregations is not the case. All this hearing; and yet many of our congregations are declining in membership. Even in the Christian Church as a whole,

across virtually all denominations, churches struggle to welcome new members. And if that isn't bad enough, those of us who do worship regularly have found ourselves becoming less attentive and less enthusiastic in our reception of God's Word. All this hearing, and yet things seem to be getting worse, not better. The problem, however, is not with God's Word; but rather, with our hearing of that Word – a hearing that blocks the Word from accomplishing its task.

Most certainly 'hearing affects living,' But the other side of that coin is also true: 'living affects hearing.' For how we live can cause us to have hearing issues, especially when it comes to hearing God's Word. That's the point emphasised in Jesus' parable before us today. In Luke's version of this parable, Jesus makes His point by saying, *"Take care then how you hear."*

One reason our living so much affects our hearing is that it is rooted in what we might call a natural cause. We come to church every Sunday to hear God's Word, throw in additional services like funerals, weddings, Advent and Lenten services, and eventually we can develop a take-it-or-leave-it, 'same old, same old' attitude to our hearing. Add the fact that when we pause from our everyday routines and go to church (on our day off, no less!), it means that we have to shift gears, and sometimes our 'transmissions' aren't up to it. We stay up late Saturday night to visit, or party, or watch a movie, and along with that late night, we had a few too many drinks. With all that kind of living, it's difficult to get revved up for listening in church on a Sunday morning. Or maybe when we do make it to church, but we are preoccupied with an important decision that must be made, or we are dealing with the aftermath of a decision already made. We're so distracted by our problems that when we do hear God's Word, we really don't listen intently to it.

Another part of how our living can interfere with our hearing of God's Word is what we could call supernatural. The devil delights in turning our thoughts away from God's Word. We've all experienced this. Jesus identifies the devil's roll in the parable before us when He says, *"the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart."* And have you ever caught yourself being inattentive during a sermon? I hate to even bring this up because I may just lose some of you at this point! When we are listening to God's Word, the devil has this uncanny way of influencing our sinful, human nature so that we drift away from our hearing and call to mind fantasies, problems and concerns that block the hearing of God's holy Word. Or you are reading some verses of Holy Scripture, when you suddenly stop and wonder, 'What did I just read?' Your mind was distracted by seemingly more pressing issues.

What's the point? Just this: although we can do nothing to add to the power of God's Word, we most certainly can do something to obstruct its power. As Jesus reminds us in the parable, if we're choked with concerns over the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, it will be difficult to hear the precious message He is telling us. Too many thorns in our lives – like carelessness, indifference, worry, grudges, materialism, pleasure – these and many more things can choke the Word of God and limit its success. Why is our faith weaker and our good works fewer even though we're attending worship services Sunday after Sunday?

How come we're hearing God's Word more but enjoying it less? These realities don't prove that the Bible is lying when it says that the more we feed on God's Word, the better off we are. They only remind us of another Biblical truth that tells us that if we have too many thorns and cares in our lives, God can't get a Word in edgewise. *"He who has ears, let him hear."*

Now, although the emphasis of our parable is on the condition of the soil to impact the seed, the Gospel of our parable is that the seed alone – that is, the message of Christ crucified and risen for us – can cause the soil to produce bountiful crops such as faith and good works. Bad living makes for poor hearing . . . which in turn, makes for more bad living – catching us in a vicious circle. But thank God, there is the other circle, too! For careful hearing, as we are strengthened and equipped through that very Word and the Sacrament, makes for good living . . . and which, in turn, makes for more careful hearing.

And why all this talk about hearing God's Word? Well, because as St. Paul says: *"It is the power of God for salvation."* Because as Isaiah writes: *"My word that goes forth from My mouth shall not return to Me empty, but shall accomplish what I please."* Yes, Jesus' Word that He saved us through His life, death, and resurrection works wonders on us and in us; for as He promises: *"As 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."* When God's Word is rightly heard, it does indeed bear fruit. And because everyone is different, that yield of fruit – the good works produced – will be different for each person.

A Greek philosopher once said, 'We have two ears but only one mouth so that we may hear more and speak less.' As Jesus speaks to us in parables, sometimes it's difficult to hear and understand what He is saying. But the more we continue hearing His Word, really listening to it, and as the Holy Spirit grants us understanding, the more we grow in daily living. And the more we grow in daily living, the more in tune we are with His promises. And then, Jesus' words to us today does not become a burden, but a joy. *"He who has ears, let him hear."* May it be so in His precious name. Amen.