

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church  
Sexagesima Sunday**

**Text: Luke 8: 4-15**

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**Theme: *The Word that Plows and Plants He who has ears to hear, let him hear. . . . The seed is the Word of God (vss. 8, 11)***

Continuing to survey the foundations of our life in Christ according to the great *solas* of the Reformation, we observe this morning the second *gesima*, *Sexagesima Sunday* and its focus on our life with God through the Word alone. It was with the parable of *the Sower and the Seed* that Jesus began to use riddles rather than straight forward language to teach the crowds so that those who have been given the secrets of the Kingdom will understand and sharpen their awareness, but those who have not, will hear but not understand. For them the proclamation of Jesus will be a clouded word of judgment. We pray that each of us would be given the right ears to both hear and understand, and especially that we might take that understanding for a greater more profitable preparation of the passion of our Lord this Lenten season. The ears that can hear are those enlightened by faith - a faith that *comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ* (Rom. 10:17).

There is both grace and judgment in the parable and the explanation that Jesus provides, yet only with ears fashioned by faith, can either be understood. Jesus told his disciples that they were given by God the ears to understand the meanings to his cryptic stories and we pray that we might be also and take what is here to heart. Let's begin with the word of judgment. As Jesus explains that the different conditions of soil in the parable represent different spiritual conditions of the human heart, He teaches us that how you hear and receive the Word of Christ depends on how your heart is disposed.

The different kinds of soil in the parable represent different conditions of the human heart in relation its receptivity to the saving Word. And by the saving Word we mean both the incarnate Word and the Word of Christ as it is proclaimed and taught. God the Father has sent His Word into the World to raise up sons and daughters of his Kingdom who, in turn lead fruitful lives. The Father is the sower and the Word He has sent, His incarnate Son, is already in the World and we meet Him on the way to Jerusalem during the Lenten Season to make his appointed date on Calvary's cross. There on a cross stuck into hardpan, He will become God's life-giving seed by his death there as He is shoved into the hard ground of our sins. There He becomes that Seed by whose death gives life to our dead hearts through the living Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments. This is the secret of the Word of God that is compared to seed: Life only comes through death - His first, and then ours when His Word is planted into our hearts. We need ears fashioned by faith to understand what is otherwise a dark secret: The Father has sent the Son into the world in the incarnate Christ. He is the implanted Word, whose death gives life. God's plan is for you to

receive this implanted Word – to receive Jesus, the incarnate Word of God and to die to sin with him - to receive life with God out of that death and, as a new creation, to become his child. The blessing of this secret for you this morning is that the Father has sown his only begotten Son into your heart that you might rightly prepare this Lenten season to receive him anew. He has come to sow and plant that which alone can bring forth a good harvest of faith and faithfulness.

The parable compares soil conditions to that of the human heart concerning receptivity to the Word of Christ which in turn invites each of us to consider: *What is the condition of my heart?* Is your heart to be compared to the hardpan, the rocky soil with weeds and thistles, or the good soil which easily can receive the sown seed? Got hardpan in your heart - a resistance to Christ and His Gospel? God rocks, weeds, and thistles - cares, commitments, and concerns in this world which make it hard to give the Word of Christ much priority? Got good soil that is really ready to receive Christ and His saving gifts? It would not be a contradiction to be able honestly to say *yes* to all these conditions. Yes, I have hardpan, rocky soils, yet also a hunger for the Word of Christ. There is a dimension within all of us that remains spiritually hard and it just naturally resists receiving Christ and His saving gifts. It is the fleshly sinful self in all of us - the Old Adam which has a hard heart to all spiritual matters. And just like soil in this fallen world, when you have been left alone, when your Old Adam heart has not been broken up by the blade of God's Law or the trials and tribulations of this fallen world - you become less receptive to the Gospel Word made flesh. And the weeds of other cares and commitments begin to sprout and grow creating a boring indifference to the saving gifts of Christ. Your work and labors in life begin to focus on your own benefit rather than that of our neighbor. You become ambivalent about the Divine Service of our Lord and his gifts and it is hard to feel hungry and joyful about the saving Word of Christ and the treasures of the Gospel.

Because we all have this fleshly, spiritually hard-hearted Old Adam in all of us, we need to pray: *Lord we need you to come and plow up our hearts. Come and make them soft and ready to receive the saving Word anew - that we may live and grow and be fruitful.* And to accomplish that again in our hearts, God brings us very soon to the season of Lent. He invites you especially to avail yourself to His work of producing a good and honest heart; a repentant heart hungry to receive that Word that suffers and dies on a cross to win for you citizenship in the Kingdom of God - to render you full of life and fruitfulness as you live it. He comes to plow that He might plant his Son and nurture faith anew into your heart and life. Can you hear this? It takes the ears of faith to both understand and appreciate that we need both words to come to us continually and that the Father would bring His Word to us in season and out of season. Lent is that penitential season when the Sower comes to prepare our hearts and minds to receive the Saving Seed that He has sent into the World. But as Jesus says, *Let he (or she) who has ears to hear, let him hear.* (vs.8)

In the Word made flesh, the Kingdom of God is coming *to you*, and coming *for you*. Nowhere else! Not in your prayers, not in your spiritual gifts, not in your good works, not in your spiritually meaningful internal experiences - nowhere else. And this saving Word who is the Christ is encountered no where else in the world now other than the proclaimed Word of the Gospel and packaged in the mundane elements of his sacraments, Baptism and the Holy Supper. This is the Word of Christ that brings you the Savior and Lord of the Kingdom to nurture and rekindle in your hearts life in Kingdom and fruitfulness in the world. Here, He is once again giving to you the ears of faith to hear and take to heart again the secrets of the Kingdom that the pre-Lent *gesimas* remind us of. You are saved by grace *alone*...by the Christ the Word *alone*...through faith *alone*. You hear? Yes, you hear!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.