

Luke 8:4–15
Sexagesima
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Our Lord deals in riddles. “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings to search things out,” as King Solomon says (Prov 25:2). And so Jesus often conceals a deeper meaning in a simple story, called a parable. A parable is a story with a hidden meaning. A parable is a riddle meant to get people thinking about what Jesus means. The crowds heard Jesus telling His parables, but they actually didn’t hear; they didn’t understand what our Lord was saying. As Jesus says in Ps 78[:2–3]: “I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.” The unbelieving crowd is like those who hear a riddle and quickly forget about it. They don’t care or think the matter all that important. But believers hear what Jesus says and they chew on it maybe even for days, going over different possibilities again and again. Finally, they say: “We give up! What’s the answer?”

Sometimes people are under the impression that parables are everyday examples, or object lessons, that Jesus uses to explain spiritual truths to the people more clearly. For example, this morning we hear the parable of the sower. The people were used to farming, either for themselves, or at least they regularly saw first-hand a sower sowing his seed. People can easily grasp that seed is scattered and will only grow, or not grow, according to where it falls. It seems like a simple illustration for a spiritual truth.

But parables are more than simply Jesus’ version of Aesop’s fables. Jesus tells us the purpose of parables is actually to keep hidden the truths of God’s Kingdom, “so that seeing they

may not see and hearing they may not understand.” The purpose of parables is not to make everything clear to everyone. The purpose of parables is to lead those who have faith into a deeper understanding of the truth of God’s Word. As Jesus prays, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Mt 11:25). By way of parables, Jesus divides the sheep and the goats. The goats wander off in the futility of their thinking. The sheep draw closer to their shepherd, asking: “What does this mean?” And to His disciples, to those who trust Him in true faith, our Lord gives the answer.

The seed is the Word of God, which is proclaimed throughout the world. The different places the seed lands are the hearts of different kinds of people. Most people are those along the path. They hear God’s Word, but they don’t really hear it. “In one ear and out the other.” Before the Word can have an effect in these people’s lives, the devil comes along and snatches up God’s Word so they cannot believe and be saved. For those along the path the Word of God is a riddle they want nothing to do with because they don’t understand it (Mt 13:19). In their blindness, they see the Bible as a book of childish fairy tales and outdated religious customs. It is simply incomprehensible to unbelievers that anyone would live his life in conformity to God’s Word.

So don’t be surprised when you seem like a fool to unbelievers. They don’t understand God’s ways because they are blinded by their father, the Devil. Instead, take care how you hear. Don’t let the preaching and the study of God’s Word go in one ear and out the other. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the words of Scripture. Let it become part of who you are. Chew on God’s Word and savor it. Mull over what it means. Explore the Bible like you would explore a new city. Mine it for the treasures therein. Remember that the Holy Spirit is always active in His

Word. Don't quench His speaking there. Don't despise preaching and the Word, but gladly hear and learn it.

Then there's the seed that fell on the rock. After it grew up, it withered away for lack of moisture. Some hear the Word of God and receive it with joy, at least for a little while. Then a time of testing comes and they fall away, like dead leaves on a tree that fly away when the wind blows. Life gets hard and they wonder: "If God isn't making my life any better then what good is religion anyway? How could I believe in a God who allows bad things to happen all the time, like an earthquake that kills over 20,000 people?" Or they become self-conscious about looking foolish before the world, or they are persecuted for belonging to the body of Christ. Those who initially receive the Word of God with joy and then fall away during a time of tribulation or persecution fall away from the faith because the Word of God does not take root in their heart. They only believed superficially, and never grew in their understanding of God's Word. Such a shallow faith can't withstand the forces at work to stamp out God's Word.

Those who hold fast to God's Word, however, don't fall away during a time of testing. Instead, the testing makes them stronger. Those with a shallow faith, those who are not rooted in God's Word, wither away under the heat of persecution. But those same trials lead a Christian to grow in faith and in understanding God's Word. A mature Christian knows that God's ways are not our ways, that God works through the lowliness and the humiliation of the cross. The death of Jesus means new life and resurrection for all those in Him. The foolishness of the cross is actually the wisdom and the power of God. So it is in our day to day lives. God works through suffering and the cross to lead us closer to Him and to one another. A Christian who holds fast to God's Word trusts that God works all things together for our good. We might not understand this in the moment, under the scorching heat of trials and tribulations. But in faith we know that our

heavenly Father is taking care of us. The trials we face and the crosses we bear are appointed by God for our good.

Next comes the seed that falls among the thorns, those who believe for a time but are then choked out by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life. If the Devil fails in his use of trials and tribulation to make us fall away, then he attempts the opposite approach, using pleasure. Or if he fails to make us fall away using pleasure, then he'll resort to trials and tribulations. Suffering on the one hand and pleasure on the other are two sides of the same coin of worldly-mindedness. Both suffering and pleasure are used in an attempt to take our focus off of what truly matters: the Word of God.

When you consider the state of the world and the state of Christianity today, it appears that the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this life are Satan's favorite tools for drawing people away from Jesus. As Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and as Demas, in love with this present world, deserted Paul, so do many forsake the faith for worldly gain. Our sinful flesh is constantly tempting us to be discontent with what God has given us. Our appetite for more things is insatiable. And for many, the goal of life is simply to get more, whether that's money, fame, or whatever. The pleasures of this life replace the hope of life in the world to come.

And finally, there's the seed that falls in the good soil: those who hear the Word of God and understand it, holding it fast with an honest and good heart, and bearing fruit with patience. These are believers. They gladly hear and learn God's Word, they recognize the trials of this life as a refining fire where the Lord is testing their hearts and strengthening their resolve. They flee the allurements of this world's treasures and pleasures and are content with what the Lord has given them. And in the end they realize that it is the Lord Himself who sows the seed of His Word. It is the Lord who tills the ground of your heart and prepares it for new growth. It is the

Lord who trims and prunes and gives you everything you need at the right time. He is watching over His Word to perform it (Jer 1:12), and He who began a good work in you will surely bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.