

2.19.2017 Sexagesima (Luke 8:4-15)

Article VI of the 39 Articles of Religion states: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” As Anglicans we believe that in His Holy Word, God has provided “all things necessary” to rescue His people from sin and spiritual death through hearty repentance and true faith in His Son our Savior Jesus Christ, the God-man who “*came into the world to save sinners*” (1 Timothy 1:15). The Holy Bible, the Book of Books declares the unimaginable truth that for love God could die, that for love God freely chose to die to redeem His people from what they most justly have deserved, “*for the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a). We’ve all seen enough of this life to know that from the moment of our birth the sin that has so corrupted this fallen world has set us on a crash course with death, and while the Bible doesn’t provide a means to avoid physical death (Hebrews 9:27), the Word of God declares a gift infinitely greater: “... *eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23b). Salvation: a priceless gift, freely given.

So, while “*the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8) is freely given by His grace through a true and lively faith, what would you give to have your own personal copy of the Word of God? What would you give to have the Book of Books in your own home to the end that you may hear the Infinite, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth speak to you in a language you can understand? Now, before you give your final answer consider the inspired words found in 2 Timothy (3:16) which declare: “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” The original Greek word used in this verse is *theopneustos*, which literally means “*God-breathed*”. Scripture is not only inspired by God, it is the very breath of God. The breath that proceeds from God the Father, the very same breath that spoke the heavens and earth into existence breathes, speaking to mankind through the pages of Holy Scripture. So, what would you give to have this Book as your own that you may feel the breath of Almighty God on your skin and know God is that near as you read His Holy Word?

I bought this Bible yesterday. I took it from a huge stack of brand-new Bibles the store had available and paid the full retail price. Would anybody like to guess the price I paid? \$1. I gave the clerk \$1 and walked out of the dollar store with a Book that was penned and printed by human hands but authored by Almighty God. \$1! The scandal of paying \$1 for God’s Word Written is an important and powerful reminder that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). As we consider the parable that Jesus shared in the Gospel reading this morning we come to the same

conclusion, because from our fallen perspective there is something wrong with the way the Sower in this story chooses to sow His seed. As you listen to this parable remember the seed is the precious Word of God which is being sown into the world by the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, *“A Sower went out to sow His seed: and as He sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that ears to hear, let him hear”* (Luke 8:5-8).

From a human perspective there is something wrong with placing a value of \$1 on God’s Word Written, and from a human perspective there is something just as wrong with the way the Sower in this parable appears to cast His precious seed so recklessly. What farmer scatters valuable seed that has the potential to *“bare fruit an hundredfold”* in such a manner? If you were a farmer and knew that feeding and providing for your family depended on this crop how would you sow your seed? Would you cast the seed and let it fall by the way-side to be trampled down and eaten by birds? Would you plant your seed on rocky ground knowing that when the tender plant sprung up it would wither and die? Would you let it fall among thorns that would grow with it and choke it? No – definitely not. The responsible and wise farmer plants his seed in good soil for he knows seed is too valuable to plant where it will not produce a crop. From a fallen, human perspective the Sower in this parable is reckless and wasteful, but God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways.

That is an important truth to remember because when we interpret this parable from a fallen, human perspective our thoughts all too often turn toward spiritual pride. Pride creeps in telling us that God would only sow His precious seed in good soil. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that we are, and have always been, the good soil. We view the way-side, the rocky ground, and the thorny places as those other men with hearts different than ours, hearts that aren’t as willing to hear and receive His Holy Word. That type of prideful interpretation sounds a lot like the self-righteous Pharisee who despised others and *“prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican”* (Luke 18:11).

We must turn from our pride and recognize the truth that this parable has nothing to do with how good we are and everything to do with how great, gracious, and merciful God is. None of us were by nature good soil. We were all conceived by the way-side, on the rocky ground, and in the thorny places. We were so very far gone from original

righteousness and completely unable to hear and come to faith in Christ by our own will, but thanks be to God for He sows abundantly and on every type of ground. He cast His precious seed on our rocky, thorn-filled hearts and by His grace and the miraculous power of His Word we believe. God casts His seed in such a way that all may hear and His desires be fulfilled. As God said through the prophet Isaiah, the Word which goes forth from My mouth “*will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it*” (Isaiah 55:11).

Our Lord casts His precious seed in such complete abandon for God “*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). This parable paints a beautiful picture of how God, through the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of His Son, provided the only Way for the beaten-down path, the rocky ground, and the thorny place to become rich, fertile soil. This is what our Lord has done in our lives and now all who profess and call themselves Christians must be His hands and feet and by the power of the Holy Spirit sow His precious Word abundantly and on every type of ground. Our Lord is calling us, the people of His Church, to sow His Word in this world by following His perfect example. When God, in the person of Jesus Christ walked this earth He revealed the love of the Father toward all people by breaking down the social barriers that religion and society had constructed. He sowed His Word abundantly and without discrimination by ministering to tax collectors and sinners, lepers and outcasts. Are we following His example and the lesson learned from the parable by sowing abundantly and on every type of ground, or are we sowing His seed cautiously, like a gardener who will only plant precious seed in a raised bed full of perfect soil? Those who sow carefully by only sharing their faith in the perfect setting and with a person they think will be receptive to the message are placing themselves above God by relying on their own ability to judge the human heart instead of leaving that up to Him. “*God knows the heart*” (Acts 15:8). Our role is simply to respond to His grace, cast His seed abundantly, and trust Him to make the seed grow for it is “*God that giveth the increase*” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

As we walk the path which leads to His kingdom may we always by the grace of God sow His precious seed abundantly, for no matter where His seed falls and regardless of what our eyes tell us, this parable is God’s promise that the harvest will be miraculously plentiful – an hundredfold!