

**“The Word of the Lord”
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday July 16, 2023**

Matthew 13:1-23

Do you believe what you just said?

“This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!”

Many of you truly believe the Bible is God’s word.

But what kind of Word is it, and what does it mean that it is God’s word?

It is words that God has spoken in a particular time, in a particular place, in a certain circumstance, to a particular people. But what does that Word have to do with us?

Jesus had been teaching a crowd in a house, he went out to teach a larger crowd gathered. So many people crowded along the shore that Jesus got into a boat so everyone could hear and see him.

Jesus went out to teach, a sower went out to sow. The action of the sower and Jesus is the same. Matthew wants you to make the connection immediately: Jesus is the sower.

The sower sows seeds, like there’s no end to the supply.
He doesn’t avoid the path, the shallow soil or the thorn bushes.
He scatters seed in abundance, covers every available inch.

Jesus was preaching to a whole great crowd.
A multitude was hearing his teaching.

We’ve already read in Chapter 12 that some who heard Jesus were offended by his words, some would try to shut him up. Many others would just ignore Jesus and his teaching. Yet still, Jesus taught.

The church is to do as Jesus did – we speak God’s word – we proclaim the Word of God – we teach it, we study it, we read it.

For we see in this scripture that God's word has the power to produce an incredible harvest. When God's word falls on good soil the Word produces a great harvest – notice it's not the hearers, but the Word that is powerful and effective.

My first CO (commanding officer) made his troops attend Padre's hours. He told me, that if you sit in a barbershop long enough, you'll probably get a haircut.

God's word changes lives – the Holy Spirit works the words into our lives, and we are changed. God's word is powerful and effective. It can produce in us a harvest for the kingdom of God.

So when the Bible is opened in worship, when you hear the scriptures, or when you read the Bible in your own daily devotions, are you expecting God's word to be spoken to you? Do you have ears ready to hear, and hearts that are listening ready to respond?

We are Presbyterians, and one of the key things that make us Presbyterians is that our faith is based on Scripture alone. We don't hold to the teaching of the Pope as infallible. We don't hold to the teaching of the minister, or a council, or even our highest church court. We hold to the Bible as our rule for faith and life. This book is not a good idea, or one book among many, *it* is the basis of what we believe.

So when it's read we are attentive, listening, anticipating that this is indeed the Word of the Lord – alive and active, that may at any moment land in the fertile soil of your heart changing us forever!

Anglicans and Roman Catholics stand when the gospel is being read. I think of it as standing at attention – there is something special about to happen, something important.

This parable is also about the not-so fertile soil. We see it all time just as Jesus did, just as his disciples did; God's word is spoken, and it is of no

consequence. It is as if the Word is immediately snatched up from those who heard it. We say, "his words are falling on deaf ears."

Jesus described people as "looking *on*, but not really looking *into*, and while they are listening they are not really standing under, and so the prophecy of Isaiah comes to perfect fulfillment in them, where it says, "Oh, you will listen a lot, but you will *never stand under* what you hear; and you will do a lot of looking at, but you will not look into. Because the heart of this people has become fat, and they have listened with thick ears, and they have squinted their eyes lest they just might see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and so turn their lives around, and I would heal them."

I found this translation by Dale Bruner particularly helpful in understanding Jesus' interpretation of the parable.

Wherever there is the word "understand" Bruner interprets it as "stand-under". For Jesus – listening to God's word has to do with *standing under its authority*. We do not come to God's word as scholars or experts – or as masters of the Word taking the answers we want. We come with humility, listening, standing under God's word so that we might begin to learn and understand, to respond in joy, letting the word take root in us, transforming us, bearing fruit in us.

Jesus warns us that there are many things that can keep us from bearing fruit as we hear God's word. Some who first receive the Word with joy can turn away because of persecution and difficulty that comes from the Word.

God's word leads us to a cross – a way different from the world. It leads us to life, but it is life through death, resurrection life come through struggles. Learning to be a disciple, learning life in Jesus' name, brings trials because we follow Jesus. We need the roots of faith, a depth that comes from being a disciple, so that the Word is nurtured.

Learning to listen to God's word – letting it bear fruit in our lives takes a bit of perseverance – it takes hanging in – continuing in worship, continuing to stand under the word, seeking encouragement from more mature believers.

Jesus also says that the cares of the world can choke God's word being grown in our lives. Do you know that struggle? God's word is real and close and starts to impact us when we're in worship, or at Bible study, or doing our daily devotions, and then we close the Bible and carry on with our day, or walk out the door of the church, and the world rushes upon us, God's word is forgotten, whatever we resolved to do is overrun by the demands of the day.

Jesus' parable describes that as thorns that choke out God's Word. We are all in danger of that happening. It takes clearing some space for God's word, letting it dwell in us with time and space, an intentional desire to let it grow in us, and setting aside those cares that threaten to choke the word.

So what do you see in your life? Do you see God's word producing a harvest? Do you sense God's word being deeply rooted in you, and bearing fruit in abundance? Do you see the fruit of the gospel in your life?

If you hear God's word to you this morning, if you sense that God's word doesn't have the meaning for you that it should, then hear also that Jesus invites us to turn to him and be healed. He scatters his Word with wild abandon – abundantly he sends it forth.

Jesus is a master teacher, his Word is powerful, and he is always willing to help with the weeds that are choking our growth, or our hearts if they are becoming hardened. He is the gardener, the Creator who loves us without exception and his plan is for us to bear fruit.

For those with ears to hear he invites us to be healed of our deafness, or have our eyes opened, and stand under his Word of the kingdom that bears a wondrous harvest for kingdom and for his glory.

Thanks be to God.