

Sermon: **[SLIDE -God's word fulfilled].**

Mark Knauss. July 11th and 12th

[SLIDE. Isaiah 55:10-11. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 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 succeed I the thing for which I sent it."]

The other day I was talking to someone you may know, Danette Gunkelman. She was disappointed that the rain that hit Medina county, earlier this week, did not make it to her backyard in Strongsville, and she had to water her plants with the garden hose. **[SLIDE of rain on a garden]**. She said that her plants prefer the rainwater over water from the hose. She can tell the difference in how her plants respond and come to life from the rain. That got me thinking. I never paid that much attention to how plant life responds to the rain.

What comes to mind is that rain is reckless **[SLIDE of a thunderstorm]**. I mean, it comes barreling down from the sky with no care to where it lands. It may fall in a pond – and that's just redundant. It lands on trees, plants, farmland, houses, concrete. It lands on buildings, airplanes, go-carts – you name it. We can't control how often it rains or how much. It's a lot like sunlight. Rain is reckless, while water from a hose is precise.

The writer of Isaiah tells us that God sends the rain to the earth for a purpose. Before it returns to the heavens, the earth uses it to grow plants that create the sower's seeds **[SLIDE of seeds/grain]**. The grain grows and provides bread for humanity. The writer seems to know that the rain returns to the heavens, and then the process is repeated. Like the rain, the Word of God has a purpose. In Isaiah, God's words are a promise to save Israel, and it happens. Like the rain, God's words do not fall to the earth without a purpose.

Isaiah tells us that the rain that falls to the earth eventually provides seeds for the sower. We know something about sowers in the Bible. Nowadays, the sower is sitting in an airconditioned cab of a John Deere Tractor pulling an N500C Air Drill **[SLIDE of a John Deere Farm Tractor]**. It's a piece of farm equipment that can sow seeds with precision and efficiency. Seeding can occur at variable rates, in widths that span dozens of feet. Seeding the farmland in 2020 involves technology that can provide consistency in seeding depth and make adjustments for soil conditions while monitoring the farm machinery for any mechanical glitches from the comfort of an air-conditioned tractor cabin. Some of you are wondering about the evenness of seed distribution as the tractor weaves and turns. There is even technology to assure that seeds are distributed evenly as the tractor winds its way across the fields. I wish John Deere made cars. Of course, they would all be green and run a little slow on the highway, but you could drive them in your garden. The sower of today's world is precise.

[Slide of a Biblical sower]. The sower in Matthew 13:1-9 is not so precise. Jesus tells the parable of the sower. This is the story where the sower throws the seeds everywhere. Some fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them. Some fell on the rocky ground. They sprouted up quickly, had weak roots, and the sun-scorched them. Some fell amongst the thorns, but as the thorns grew, they choked them. Other seeds fell on the good soil – grain came forth.

This sower of the seeds is reckless. If we were the foreman, we might ask that the sower not waste throwing seeds on the path or the rocks. We might ask for a little more accountability. For the sower in Matthew, there is no effort to 'spare' some of the seeds or spread it evenly and efficiently.

The seed is God's Word, for you and I to hear and let grow within us. God's word comes to us like the rain that pours over all the earth, nourishing our souls. **[SLIDE -God's word nourishes our souls.]** We receive God's word in our Bibles, sing hymns, and pray it together. We give and receive it through the neighbor that God calls us to be in a relationship with. We share in the body and blood of the risen Christ. God is the sower who does not hold back. Unlike a plant that can be drowned by flood waters if it rains too much, we can never drown in God's word. God's word only nourishes us. It opens our eyes to God's presence and purpose for our lives.

Some of the seed lands on the path where they sit until the birds come and eat them. These represent people who hear but do not listen. God's word does not penetrate their souls but sits there until anything takes it away. What is the sower to do? God continues to sow and encourages us to be sowers too.

[SLIDE - God knows what we need better than we do]. It is human nature that we think we know what we need at any given moment and in any given situation. We decide what is important and not important, and we are not open to seeing what God the sower is doing around us.

I remember a time, it was 1986, and I was sitting in Anatomy and Physiology lecture with around 100 students in the classroom. I noticed a female student in sweats and a ballcap who stopped to talk to the teacher before sitting a few seats behind me. I didn't say two words to her all quarter. I said a few words to her the next spring quarter, only because I walked out of a final, and she was sitting on the curb waiting for a friend. We talked for a few moments

and said goodbye, wishing each other a 'good summer.' Who knew that we would become friends months later in nursing school. Now Sharon and I have been married for 29 years.

My first on-campus class at Luther seminary was in January 2016 when I took Psalms with Professor Jacobson. I sat in the second row, and another student named Chad sat in the back. I don't think we talked until at least a year later in another class. Like me, Chad is married, has a family, and is changing careers. He graduated this past May and is taking a position as a pastor in Sydney, Nebraska. For a few years now, we have been friends. We talk every week and discuss the lectionary, sermons we are writing, and life challenges as we both move into our new callings.

In both of these instances, I didn't realize that people whom God was placing in my life were sitting in a classroom with me, and we barely acknowledged each other. God has sown people right in my midst, who carry me spiritually, and it takes months if not years for me to notice it. It makes me wonder who else God has sown in my life that I have not yet noticed. It tells me that though I think I know what is essential, God knows what I need, and sows that in my life. Sometimes the seeds God sows are people, and I walk right by them.

[SLIDE – Our souls need the word of God]. The plants in Danette's back yard prefer the rain of creation over water from the hose. Our souls prefer the word of God over anything this world has to offer. Saint Augustine said, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." God made us for God's-self, and God knows what our souls need for their sustenance. When we die, our bodies are left here, and our souls belong to God. When we enter that eternal kingdom, we will see the heavenly sower hard at work, sustaining heavenly and earthly souls. We will see Jesus.

Isaiah tells us that the waters that come down from heaven accomplish a purpose before returning to heaven. **[SLIDE of Jesus risen]**. We see this in Jesus. Jesus comes into creation and does not return to God until he accomplished what he came here to accomplish – overcoming death and the devil, and assuring us of eternal life. John says it so well, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus' life is taken on the cross, but God's purpose, God's mission does not end there. Jesus rises from the dead and returns to heaven to prepare a place for us. Jesus returns to heaven when God's purpose is complete.

Isaiah compares the word of God to the waters from heaven, and tells us that God's word does not return to heaven until it accomplishes what it was sent to accomplish. What is so cool is that before the word of God returns, it creates something better. The world is made a better place. **[SLIDE Isaiah 55:12.] "For you shall go out in Joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."** Like the rain waters that feed the plants and bring forth life that is not revealed when watered from the garden hose, God's word fills this world with life that can only come from our creator, but we have to pay attention to it. To my untrained eye, I never noticed that creation prefers rain water, until Danette drew my attention to it. To the untrained eye, people don't see God the sower at work in this world. When we don't look for God at work, we become the hardened ground that the seed bounces off of.

Rain pours down with reckless abandon and changes the earth. The word that God sends to the earth comes to us in abundance, changing us and the world. God calls us to be fertile soil where the sower can continually plant. God is never done with us. We are called to be that fertile soil where the Kingdom of God takes root, and we are called to be sowers in the

field. Though it may seem like we are sowing on hard soil and rocks, don't worry, keep sowing.

[SLIDE - God's word does not return to God empty but fulfilled]. AMEN