



Sunday 2nd March 2025

Isaiah 55:10-13

Luke 6:39-49

The Rev'd Canon Jenny Wilson

In the name of God, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, ... Amen.

There are some days when, pondering the events in the world, we find ourselves *shuddering*, and we go out into the garden, perhaps, and look at the sky, and cry out, 'Is there a word from the Lord?'

In our Old Testament reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, we hear the voice of the Lord comparing the word of the Lord to the rain that comes down from heaven watering the earth, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. "So shall my word be ... it shall not return to me empty but shall accomplish that which I shall purpose," the Lord says.

Earlier in this passage the Lord speaking through the prophet speaks about our thirst:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,

come to the waters;

and you that have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, ...

Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant...

Everyone who thirsts ... that is us I think. Each one of us in our own way, thirsting for hope, for understanding, for the presence of love and forgiveness. Thirsting in a world that seems increasingly to leave us shuddering at the violence in word and speech, shuddering at leadership that seems inspired by

anything other than the word of the Lord that is like rain coming from heaven to water the earth. Yes, our hearts are thirsty. The scriptures often use images of water and thirst to portray the longing in the human heart. But in the end what we are encouraged to reach out for is not physical water, in the end the Lord says, “Listen ... listen carefully to me ... Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant...”

Our thriving comes from listening. From inclining our ears to the one who will make an everlasting covenant with us, a deep and abiding relationship with us.

And what do we listen for? A word from God. A communication from God to us. As God says through Isaiah in the passage we heard this morning:

*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 in the thing for which I sent it.*

God will speak a word. A word that is sent into the world. A word with a purpose. A word that will return to God and will not return empty.

What is amazing about this, something to which we are so accustomed that we may not notice it, is that *God speaks to us*. God longs to communicate with us. God is lonely without us. We saw this in the scene from the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve are hiding knowing themselves naked and God is searching for them, saying “where are you?” God longs for our company. And so, God speaks a word, a word that will not return empty.

In the scene from this morning’s reading from the Gospel of Luke we see Jesus, the Word of God, speaking, teaching in the final portion of the Sermon on the Plain. Certainly, it is in the Prologue to John’s Gospel that we hear of Jesus spoken of as the Word of God, the Word that “became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth.” Jesus is God’s self-communication, God’s way of revealing God’s nature to us, God’s speaking to us.

What do we hear then, from the words spoken by Jesus in this time of teaching, Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, known as the Sermon on the Plain.

For three Sundays we have spent time in this scene. Two weeks ago, Margaret Peel-Shakespeare led us in a reflection on the blessings and the woes, summarizing them with the beautiful thought that what Jesus is really saying is that “God is enough”. Last Sunday we heard Jesus challenging the crowd with his thoughts about love and forgiveness– “love your enemies” he said, “do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” and Lynn Arnold led us with a deep reflection on the nature and limits of the human capacity to love.

Finally, this morning we have a series of little parables. The words of Jesus, told one after another in parables that may well challenge and puzzle us. One after another they fall from his lips. We could quite imagine those listening say, “please ... will you slow down! We haven’t begun to understand what you last said. Will you slow down and explain what you are saying to us?” But he doesn’t seem to want to slow down. Little parable after little parable are spoken by the one who is the Word of God, hoping that he will help us understand the nature of God and especially the nature of us, of we frail human beings.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, “Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye”, when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.

He knows us well. We might sense some discomfort at his insight into our nature. Yes, it is much easier to see another’s flaws than our own. Are we like this? Gazing on others, almost reassured by their faults. Failing to reflect on ourselves and our failings. Rarely wondering if we see clearly enough to judge another. Looking with judgement rather than compassion. What does Jesus mean when he tells us to take the logs out of our own eyes before we take the speck out of our neighbours’ eyes? How can we take the log out of our eye if we cannot see? Is he smiling at us when he says this? It seems he’s caught us in a trap if we think we can sort our blindness out by ourselves. If we have a log in our own eye, we could not possibly see to remove it. Of course ... only he can remove it. Only he can wash our eyes clean. And if we dare to turn to him, and allow it, might we then look at our neighbour with a speck in their eye with compassion. Might we confess that we had a log in our eye? Might we tell them that it was Jesus who took that log out of our eyes. Might we lead them to him?

The final parable Jesus tells in this time talking to a crowd on a level plain is about a builder:

“Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I tell you? He says. I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the

foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.'

It is clear what Jesus longs for – he knew the words of the prophet Isaiah – they would have been written in his soul. He said to those listening at the end of this sermon on the Plain, “I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.” He wants us to hear his words, for he knows what God’s words can do for those who listen deeply. They are like *a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.*

The ones who listen to Jesus’ words are safe, are secure, when the flood comes, when everything that seemed to be what we could hold onto seems to be falling apart, be it in the lives of those who we hold dear, be it in countries far away that we thought we understood, be it floods, real live floods that rise and enfold persons, communities, nations, even.

It is a mystery how it is that Jesus can say this when we see in our world the things we see. But he does say it. He does bid us come to him and hear what he says to us. And we might come, we might trust him, ... for like him we have ringing in our ears Isaiah’s words ... that God’s word, Jesus’ words, are like the rain and the snow that come down from heaven, watering the earth and bringing forth seed to the sower and bread to the eater. God’s word will not return empty.