

Christ Prepares Your Heart for the Word

(St. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

For Your Life in Christ the Week of the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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Saint Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

Introduction: The Importance of Hearing and Listening

- A. Ever been accused of "in one ear and out the other?" I am frequently reminded that I can't do two things at once...true for the most part!
- B. But HEARING and LISTENING is crucial for human communication:
 - 1. We communicate with words.
 - 2. ...with the way we say them.
 - 3. ...with the gestures which accompany them.
 - 4. ...but ESPECIALLY through HEARING and LISTENING!
- C. We can and should work on communication skills as these are integral for good relationships, but some say the ability to really HEAR people is a gift.
- D. Jesus concludes today's parable with the words:

Matthew 13:9: *"He who has ears; let him hear."*

- E. We pray that by the grace of God, we would truly HEAR and even more, truly LISTEN and RECEIVE His Word into our hearts and minds so that the Holy Spirit would work faith in us! Why? This is the only way to receive faith!

Romans 10:17: *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

Part I: The Parable of the Sower was our Lord's first parable:

- A. It does not compare persons or soil per se, but compares the relationship people have with the Word of God.
- B. The point of the comparison is the SEED = Word and the person's relationship with that SEED. The Word is that "seed" which gives spiritual and eternal life.
- C. So Jesus is NOT saying that some people are better than others. By nature, everyone is against God.

Hosea 13:9: *"You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your helper."*

- D. Again, the concern is our relationship with the Word.
- E. At Matthew 13:19, the NIV makes an error in describing the work of the evil one in relationship to his attack against us and the Word. Describing the scenario in which the evil one snatches the Word from a person, the NIV says at the end of verse 19:

"This is the seed sown along the path."

- F. The ESV gets the original better:

"This is what was sown along the path."

- G. The problem is not the SEED (the Word), the problem is with the person's reception and relationship in respect to the Word of God.

Part II: Three Words on the Right Relationship with God's Word:

- A. Word #1: HEAR (v 23)! All have this in common. The question is what will accompany the hearing? This is where faith begins. We must be in the position to HEAR the Word. This ALONE is a great reason for being faithful in the ministry of Christ's Church.
- B. Word #2: UNDERSTANDING (v 23). This word means to receive, accept and take in. These are all the results of the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Here we do not simply hear, but the Word reaches our inner being.
- C. Word #3: PRODUCE/BEAR (v 23): This is the work of the Holy Spirit seen in practical conduct and life. This is what hearing and understanding produces: good works which are the fruit of faith!

Transition: But our sin comes out precisely to keep us from hearing; to keep us from understanding; and therefore to keep us from producing.

- A. One of my personal gripes in life is in respect to audio toys and tech requiring ear-phones or ear-buds. Have you ever tried talking to a person with ear-buds?

On May 21st, this tragic report came through the news: An 18-year-old girl has been fatally hit by a train while using her earphones...[her heart-broken mother was reported to say] "I've told my kids time and time and time again until I was blue in the face - and I will tell all of the youngsters out there - when you're walking down the street and you got your headphones on, keep one headphone in and one headphone out so you can hear the world around you," she said. "I believe that if she had listened to me and done what I said, she would have heard the train coming."

- B. The earphone and ear-buds thing is analogous to many distractions which *we choose* in the world over and above God's Word *so that we are unable to hear the Word of Christ!*
- C. Sensationalism tags the hot button moral and ethical issues, war in the world, etc. to blame the deterioration we see around us, but nothing is as bad as this very basic and fundamental problem: people are too busy and distracted to hear Jesus speaking to them through His Word...and when there is no hearing, there is no understanding, and when there is no understanding, there is no life.
- D. This is our most serious problem and sin. Just think of all the things you do to actively avoid God's Word so that you can say, "I'm too busy...and I have good reasons to wear all kinds of ear-buds in my life."

Part III: So We Need To Know How The Lord Intends To Protect Your Relationship With His Word!

- A. Through the various scenarios of people's relationship with the Word, we are to learn:
1. What fights against receiving and keeping the Word of God: we are to identify and confess these things in our life and repent of that which fights against our proper reception and keeping of the Word.
 2. We become more aware that it is only in Christ that we can continue to properly receive and keep the Word of God. We must receive the Lord's teaching in today's Gospel:

B. Hear and heed the warnings:

Case #1: Matthew 13:19

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path."

Explanation: These reflect the Pharisees who rejected Christ. This is the evil denial of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word for "evil" describes active evil; a way of life against God and His Word.

Case #2: Matthew 13:20-21

"As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."

Explanation: These are those who experience immediate and superficial positive reactions to the Gospel fueled by emotion. But when things get hard: when this person is tempted and forced to suffer on account of their faith, they feel that they should not have to suffer and they turn away from bearing the cross for Christ. They are fair-weathered "Christians".

In the first case, the devil leads a person to actively engage in an evil life that immediately rejects Christ, but in the second case, the person gives the faith a try until it gets difficult, then they're out.

Case #3: Matthew 13:22

"As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

Explanation: Here, as opposed to focusing on hardships that come from following Christ, these folks are drawn away from Christ for the pleasures of the world. Scripture warns about this in other places:

1st Timothy 6:10: *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."*

1st John 2:15-17: *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and*

*the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.
17And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”*

The one who is blessed by grace through faith in the Lord has all three words describing their life: HEAR, UNDERSTAND and BEARS FRUIT. Remember, however, that these are GIFTS from the Lord *through His Word and Sacrament by the power of the Holy Spirit!* Constantly receiving this Word of Christ leads you to Christ who:

1. Heard for you. He heard the Father’s call to live, die, and rise for you (John 6:38: Christ came to do the Father’s will) and by His hearing you are saved.
2. Understood for you. Understood and understands your needs perfectly (Hebrews 4:15: He sympathizes with our weaknesses) and by His understanding you are saved.
3. Bore fruit for you. (1st Corinthians 15:20: His resurrection = “the first-fruits”) and by His bearing fruit for you, you are saved. This fruit He bore has won forgiveness for all of your sins dear Christian; His fruit has made your heart rich soil for true faith; His fruit has conquered death with life; and His fruit has produced in you not a so-called faith here today and gone tomorrow; but a faith in which you also bear fruit...some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.