

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Augustly 3, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 55:10-11

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (NIV)

I don't watch much television during the summer and very rarely will I watch on Sunday if the sun is shining (at least not before football season). Yet, the other Sunday after church I turned on some of the local channels when I got home and there were those info commercials. I didn't know they still had those.

One channel was advertising for this weed whip with strings that never break. They showed how the string could cut through wood and demonstrated cutting around an entire chain linked fence without the string breaking at all. It looked like a pretty impressive display. On another channel they were selling a pressure cooker. It is able to cook things really fast at a high temperature. The appeal was you could let this thing take care of the cooking for you – get the food fast and cook a lot of food for many people with little effort. Just throw it in and before you know it you have a whole bunch of barbecue ribs that fall off the bones. It looked pretty good. Of course, all these items come with guarantees. They make claim after claim and back it up with yet one more money back guarantee if you are not satisfied after so many days. They guarantee their product will work just as you've seen it on T.V.! But most of us have lived long enough in this consumer age to make us a bit skeptical of such products and guarantees.

Once again today we are pointed to something that is able to do great and amazing things. Actually what this does is almost unbelievable. And yes we are given another guarantee. We are told this product will do exactly what we are told it will do. It will not fail. It will accomplish what it is supposed to accomplish and will achieve the purpose for which it is sent. Of course we are talking about the Word, the Bible. The guarantee we have is from God. There is no money back offer with this product, but something much more valuable rests upon this Word – our eternal salvation. So listen as the Lord speaks to Isaiah, and to us, this morning and never, ever forget this invaluable truth: **The Word Works!**

Isaiah, in many ways is just a fascinating Old Testament book. It is very much like a mini Bible. There are 66 chapters in Isaiah just like there are 66 books of the Bible. The first 39 chapters, while they contain some beautiful gospel promises, are heavy on law and similar to the Old Testament. The last 27 chapters focus more on the gospel and the comfort of forgiveness of sins through the coming Savior, again similar to the focus of the New Testament. Isaiah is a prophet who speaks God's Word – all of it. From the promise of a Child who will be born for us (from a virgin to boot) to the Savior who will be pierced and crushed for our sins – nowhere in the Old Testament do we get a more clear picture of Christ.

But Isaiah also had a challenging ministry. When God called him to go with His Word He told him the people He was sending him to would be ever hearing but never

understanding. Then God said this: ***“Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*** (6) In other words, God told Isaiah that His preaching – with those beautiful gospel promises would be rejected by many. It would serve to further many in their unbelief. Many will harden their hearts all the more to the Word. It makes me wonder if Isaiah ever began to question what good his ministry was doing. Did the Word really work? Why did so many people hear the Word of God and treat it as though Isaiah was saying blah blah blah blah?

That’s why this wonderful guarantee had to be so refreshing and encouraging. ***“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*** Keep preaching Isaiah. The Lord is telling His prophet to keep speaking His Word. It is like the rain and snow that waters the earth. The Word always brings results. While at times those results will be the hardening of hearts, there will be those who will believe and be saved. God’s Word never returns to Him empty. The Word works.

Do we ever need the same reminder? I know I do. I need this reminder that it is our job to simply proclaim the word that comes out of His mouth – to preach God’s Word. I need the reminder that proclaiming God’s Word is never without results because it will not return to God empty. I need to hear this constantly in an age when more and more people are turning away from God’s Word and looking for other things because they feel something else is needed to grow the church other than an outdated book like the Bible. I need the encouragement that like rain and snow that waters the earth, God’s Word will bring about good results. I am thankful to hear once again that preaching His Word is never in vain.

God’s Word works. I’d like to now read a list of names for you this morning as living proof. Some of your names would be on other lists as the Word was proclaimed in your homes and first preached to you by another pastor or teacher. These are names I have been privileged to see God’s Word work on during what feels like my short time here at Amazing Grace. Here is a list of those to whom God has come to through water and His Word in holy baptism. (Read 59 names) Here is a list of only those I have seen confirmed in faith and who have confessed Jesus to be their Savior after being instructed by God’s Word here at Amazing Grace. (Read 58 names)

While hearing all those names might remind us of the truth of our Gospel lesson of the seed that falls on all kinds of ground, the truth I pray we also see is the Word works. Each one of you here this morning is living proof that the Word brings about results just as God promises it will. The Word works because it keeps bringing us to Jesus who did all the work of saving us from our sins. It works because Jesus did the work of living a perfect life. It works because Jesus did the work of suffering and dying on the cross to make full payment for all sin. It works because Jesus did the work of rising from the dead and defeating death. It works because Jesus did all the work necessary to open heaven for us.

The Word works. So what does this mean for us? For one thing it means it is a pretty important thing to stay in the Word! I pray we, like those on good soil, listen to God’s Word and keep listening to God’s Word so that in us it ***“produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*** It also means God has giving our church everything it needs to do His work – for we have right here the Word that comes out of His mouth. So, dear friends, I

pray we keep faithfully spreading seeds everywhere. I pray we faithfully keep preaching the Word. I pray we do with the confidence that the Word always works! This is no info commercial. We have God's 100% guarantee. Amen.