

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The text for this sermon are these verses from today’s Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 55.10-11:

<sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> 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.

Through the Prophet Isaiah God is saying to us that His Word will accomplish his purpose. That is the theme of this sermon: **God’s Word accomplishes God’s purpose.**

I know exactly where I was on June 22, 1969. I just happened to be in Cleveland, Ohio. It is a memorable date because on that day in downtown Cleveland, the Cuyahoga River caught on fire! It’s pretty dramatic to stand there watching fire trucks pump water into a river that has caught on fire and is burning!

That a river *could* catch on fire and burn was not a miracle, it was not an act of God. It was the result of the amount of toxic, noxious chemicals dumped into it. The Cuyahoga was one of many rivers that brought toxic chemicals into Lake Erie and made Lake Erie a “dead zone” – *nothing* could live in that lake. The Cuyahoga catching on fire was a blessing in disguise – it brought attention to what we were doing to our rivers and lakes and brought about some changes. Lake Erie has been cleaned up and is once again teeming with life.

It illustrates what St. Paul is talking about in our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson this morning (Romans 8) when he says that “creation itself is in bondage to decay”. Creation – the physical universe, the planet we live on, is in bondage to decay. It is “perishable”, “spoilable”, and in way too many instances, we have spoiled it.

The physical universe is no longer the perfect, pristine place God intended it to be at creation. Our rebellion against the Creator has tragic consequences not just for humanity but for *all* of creation. It’s not just a matter that we soil our own nest, that we spoil this planet that we live on, we have made it “spoilable”.

“Global warming” – you can argue the science. You can look at the evidence and make a case that it is or is not taking place. But you can’t argue the theology: it *could* happen because the earth is “spoilable”.

The ground produces thorns and thistles and weeds that choke out the good stuff we want to grow. Great storms pass over us and sweep away countless lives. The most beautiful sycamore tree I have ever seen grew on the corner of our lot – it died and dropped its massive limbs on our neighbors house. The Chesapeake bay is no longer producing a bounty of crabs and oysters because of the runoff from the stuff we put on our lawns. A beloved pet gets old and sick and passes on, and it breaks our heart. We dump enuf chemicals into a river that it catches on fire! It’s all part of creation’s bondage to decay.

But in that 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson St. Paul also articulates a **hope**. Creation has an “eager longing” to be set free from it’s bondage to decay. That’s probably an “anthropomorphism”, but it’s kinda easy to image creation longing to be set free. The next time you get ready to step on a cockroach if you listen carefully you might hear “Why me????”

Creation has an eager longing to be set free from it’s bondage to decay. And, St. Paul says, it ***will be!*** Creation will be set free when we are set free. Creation will be redeemed when we are redeemed. Creation will be freed from death and decay when we are freed from death and decay.

And that day is coming.

God says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth ... 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’s Word will accomplish God’s purpose.

God’s Word comes to us in so many ways. His Word is woven into the fabric of creation, it is spoken by his prophets, it is recorded in our Scripture. It is made visible in Water, and in Bread and Wine. We sing God’s Word in our worship. This past Wednesday our “Minister of Jazz”, C. Anthony Bush took his ministry to a DC Club, Bushboys & Poets, and presented God’s Word in his music to a pack room.

But remember, first and foremost, the Word of God is his **Son**. “In beginning was Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh,” St. John writes in his Gospel.

Any Word that God speaks will accomplish his purpose. But the **deepest** desire of God’s heart is accomplished in the **Living Word**, Jesus Christ. God sent his son, the Word, to die on the cross, and His death frees us from our bondage to sin and death.

And with us, all of creation!

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and whoever believes in him should not perish but has eternal life.” The words are etched in our hearts. St. John continues: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved thru him.” The “world” certainly includes every single human being. But more. The word “world” St. John uses is actually the word “cosmos”: it includes all of creation. God’s love is cosmic! It includes not just humans but all of God’s creation.

All of creation will be set free from the bondage to decay by the Living Word. St. Paul writes in Colossians 1 (v.19 - 20): “<sup>19</sup>For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through Christ God was pleased to reconcile to himself ***all things***, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace thru the blood of his cross.” All things! Not just all people, but everything God creation.

The day is coming when we shall be freed from our bondage to death and decay, and with us, creation will be set free from ***it’s*** bondage to death and decay.

Part of the joy and the responsibility and the struggle of being a Christian is in knowing that that Day is coming, and striving to live *right now* like that Day has arrived.

One day I will be *able* to love God with all my heart and my neighbor as self. Today, as a person redeemed by Christ, I have to struggle to live like that. One day beautiful garden of God's creation will be restored. Today I have to struggle to take better care of God's creation, both myself and my planet.

But with God's grace and the help and support and encouragement of God's family that's what we do: try to live *today* like the redeemed Children of God we will one day become.

And we struggle to do that knowing that God's word accomplishes God's purposes. That's true for the big, *cosmic* picture of Christ redeeming all things. It's also true for all of the nooks and crannies of my life: God's word accomplishes God's purposes.

That's why we pray. Prayer is the way we bring God's word – His living Word, Jesus – to bear on the most specific things happening in our lives. Jesus invites us to pray about anything, everything. It's how we get the Word to touch the hurts, the pains, the sickness, the dying places of our lives. It's how we get the Word to touch the needs of others.

And God's word will accomplish God's purposes.

God's word will accomplish *GOD'S* purposes. Prayer is not a way to get what *we* want. It's a way to accomplish what *God* wants. I ask every Confirmation class "does God *always* answer prayers?" A few always say "No". "Tell me what you mean by 'no'" "Well, I asked for stuff and I didn't get it. So God didn't answer that prayer." Well, you maybe didn't what you asked for, but you can trust that thru that prayer God accomplished what *God* wanted. That's why we pray "not my will, but Yours be done".

God's Word accomplishes God's purpose. That's why we need to be in the Word. Reading Scripture, in prayer, in worship, in relationship with Christ the Living Word. So that through exposure to that Word, God can accomplish his purposes in us. Bottom line: be in the Word.

God's word comes to us in so many ways. In the Gospel story this morning Jesus says there are four ways we can receive that Word. We can be obtuse – like a hard path the Word can't penetrate. We can place too low a value on the Word – like rocky soil where nothing can take root. We can be so busy that the Word can't compete – like weeds that choke seed.

Or we can be good soil – letting the Spirit sink the Word deep into our hearts. And letting God accomplish his purpose in us.

**Lord, let my heart be good soil,  
Open to the seed of your Word.  
Lord, let my heart be good soil,  
Where love can grow and peace is understood.  
When my heart is hard, break the stone away.  
When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.  
When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.  
Lord, let my heart be good soil.**