

Read: ¹⁰ *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, ¹¹ 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...*

1. It's like wet season in Cairns. It wouldn't make sense for the rain to pour down and then bounce off the ground and launch back into the heavens where it came from. It wouldn't make sense for the 2 or 3 metres of annual rain fall we receive in Cairns to leave the ground, the grass, the food crops, the water storage unaffected and untouched. The rain comes down and here in FNQ it turns everything green. The crops that put food on our tables grow and mature towards harvest. The grass goes crazy and we are pulling our lawn mowers out of the shed what seems like every 3rd or 4th day!

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah today and tells us to expect something similar to happen when it comes to His holy Word. It doesn't just bounce off the ground or off people and back to heaven where it came from – God's word produces results in accordance with His higher will and purpose. It does something in the lives of people who know and love God and it produces an affect in the lives of those who hear the Word but don't know or love God.

- One thing is sure – the Word of God is not vague or indifferent.
- It confronts and accuses sin which can produce anger, defiance or repentance.
- It teaches and builds our biblical literacy of God's story and our place in it, allowing us to recall into our memory soothing scripture verses when we find ourselves in any kind of need.
- The Word comforts and points people to Christ and the eternal gifts we receive in His name.
- *But the Word is not indifferent.*

Is this how you picture God's word working in your life? Do you know the sureness and effectiveness that God speaks about through Isaiah? If someone close to you asked, 'How is God's Word at work in your life – or what difference does it make to your day?' How would you respond? Could you respond? Can you say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:8, "The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart?"

2. It's important that we have ears to hear what God is saying to us today. That's the call of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. He is speaking to a large crowd and telling them a parable about a farmer sowing seed.

This seed is scattered and falls along the path, on rocky places, among thorns and in good soil where it bears fruit. Then Jesus finishes what he's saying with the call, ¹⁰ *Whoever has ears, let them hear.* That's a very important call from Jesus – and one we often overlook. But having ears that hear is the key as we listen to God's Word today.

- What are you hearing?
- What are you drawn to in this parable? Often people zone-in on the soil.

They think soil is the most important point of Jesus' parable because the soil is about people (us). They look at the seed on the path but it's eaten up by birds – no-one wants to be the path.

So they look at rocky ground – and the seed in the rocky ground ends up scorched and withered; that's not very appealing, so no-one wants to be rocky ground. No-one sees themselves being choked out by weeds – so we move on to the good soil. Ahhh finally, good soil bears fruit and best of all - "it's good!" That's far more appealing. Well then, the obvious conclusion must be: *"I'm good soil!"*

3. Today we're not going to ignore the soil –but through discerning ears recognize that it's secondary to the seed.

We're going to zone in on the seed. The reason for that is simple: The seed is the stand in for the Word of God in this parable. Seed = Word. That makes it our primary focus – because everything else flows from the work of the Word in this passage.

It's primary because, *Jesus' word (which is God's Word) brings into this world the Divine power of the Kingdom of God.*

Remember what God spoke through Isaiah? *'My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it...'* and here is God's purpose today!

The seed depicted in this parable is so powerful and so unstoppable that it brings with it the other worldly power, the Divine power of the Kingdom of God into this world.

May we have ears to hear this today! The Word of God brings with it the powerful Kingdom of God into the world you and I live in.

That means the Kingdom of God has come to us!

Do you realize that you pray for this reality every time you open your mouth in the Lord's Prayer and say, "Your Kingdom come?"

What we're saying to God by these three words is, *'Lord we pray that you would first of all give us your Word, so that your gospel would be proclaimed properly throughout this world.'*

We're praying to God saying, *'Lord may your gospel be received in faith and go to work on us and live in us, so that through the Word and the Holy Spirit's power (Rom 15:18-19) Your Kingdom may triumph among us.*

*And we pray that the devil's kingdom be put down (Lk 11:17-20) so that he may have no right or power over us.'*¹

Maybe you know the Lord's Prayer by heart, but did you realize that you're praying for an immeasurable treasure and everything that God himself possesses when you pray 'Your Kingdom come?' Three words carry so much weight.

But are we really so surprised? Those three little words are powerful kingdom seeds (Holy Scripture)! God's kingdom comes to us through powerful kingdom seeds.

- Knowing this priceless treasure: the question for us today is would you be prepared to miss out on what these powerful kingdom seeds bring to your life?
- Or are you willing to live according to God's commandment, gladly hearing and learning His word?
- Can you see value in building our collective biblical literacy and understanding in the days, months and years ahead of us?

4. In order to take these steps we'll need some honest reflection and maybe even a U-Turn. Because although we might draw a straight line from ourselves to the good soil in

¹ Large Catechism, part 3, The Lord's Prayer

today's parable, we need to acknowledge that there are times and seasons in our lives when that's not the case at all.

- Sometimes we've been 'the path' where the birds have eaten the seed. Perhaps you didn't quite understand God's word, but you didn't bother to follow it up and seek understanding and the enemy came and took it from you.
- Have you been rocky ground where the seed from last Sunday sprang to life, but then identifying yourself as a Christian or speaking up for Kingdom values was too risky for you – and so you saw great potential wither away and die.
- Were there work issues, health problems, money issues, relationship challenges and a host of worries in your life that took priority *choking out* the Word like the seed cast among thorns?
- Maybe you've experienced times or even seasons of indifference to God's Word? That means indifference to God, the Kingdom of God and everything God possesses and offers to us through those powerful kingdom seeds today.

5. This all points us in the direction and to the importance of the Lord's powerful Kingdom seeds. Listen again as the Lord speaks to you today, *'...my word that goes out from my mouth: will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it...'*

For the people in Isaiah's day, this word pointed to a time when they would be freed from captivity and exile and return home to Jerusalem.

But it also pointed them, like us to an event with a much higher purpose in accordance with the will of God. Something only God could accomplish. That happened scripture tells us 'when the Word became flesh and dwelled among us - full of grace and truth.' (Jn1:14ff)

Jesus not only lived and ministered among us, but he died and was raised for us – for you.

- He died for the sin of your indifference.
- All the issues and brokenness that choke out the word in your life;
- All the times you've denied him or been too lazy to seek understanding – every sin was laid upon Him.

And having carried the burden of every sin, he burst forth from the grave freeing us all from those burdens to walk in newness of life – because God's word is an unstoppable force and because God's purposes will not be conquered by sin, death or the devil.

God's purpose was that His Kingdom - an immeasurable treasure and everything that God himself possesses, would be appropriated in your life and the lives of others through Jesus and His cross.

God has accomplished this. 1st Peter tells us, ²³ *...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... This word is the good news that was preached to you.* ²

6. Your eyes have received spiritual sight and your ears have become good and fertile soil. This is all on account of what God has purposed, accomplished and applied to your life through Jesus. We are Kingdom people on a journey with our King.

²¹ Peter 1:23-25

- That journey calls you to open up the scriptures.
- It calls you to gladly and willingly hear, listen and learn from the witness of scripture speaking into your life.
- Remember that verse from 1 Peter, “...*you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...*”

Today I want to wrap up by giving you some practical tools to help you on this journey. So if you're here today wondering 'how might I listen to the voice of God in the bible?' *How is the Word a living and abiding word in me?* ...then make a note of these four simple questions: (handout)

As you read the bible verses set out for the week (which we print for you in the bulletin) read the text asking yourself these four questions:

- 1. *What is it that this word of God is teaching me?***
- 2. *What is there to be thankful for as I listen to these verses?***
- 3. *What is there for me to confess or turn away from?***
- 4. *Flowing out of this scripture, what is it that I need to ask God to help me with today?***

It's not the only way to read scripture, but I offer it to you today as a tool that may help you make a start.

A start coming under the Word's authority to learn, to respond appropriately with thanksgiving, to come clean with the sins that so easily entangle us all, and to ask God for help as He walks with you each day. That's a living relationship.

- So will you join me in the Word starting with the month of July?
- Will you open your bible daily for 5 or 10 minutes so those powerful kingdom seeds can fall on the fertile soil of your heart?

God's word doesn't return to him void, so expect that He will be at work in you! I look forward to hearing how. May God give you the strength and perseverance you need to follow through on this. Amen.

Pray: Teach us your way O Lord, that we might walk in your truth, to our benefit and lead others to walk through this life with us in a living relationship with you. We pray for your harvest – you are the Lord of the Harvest and so we commend ourselves and our loved ones to you asking for you to have mercy on us in Jesus' name. Amen!