

A Sermon for Sexagesima Sunday
St. Luke 8:4–15
by Peter Bockoven

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God” (Luke 8:11).

I. Christ was an incredible man. From the moment he began preaching publicly, many who heard him became amazed at his power and authority, his doctrine and teaching, his way of life and character. And not only was he a powerful teacher, with amazing teachings: he was a powerful teacher, with amazing works: he raised the dead, he healed the sick, he calmed mighty storms, by his word alone. Such works gathered more amazement and wonder from the crowds that followed him and received his teaching.

II. So amazed were the people that, at one point, after Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, the crowds followed the Lord, seeking to be fed more by him. But the point of Christ’s ministry and work was not simply to feed people with food. So he told the people: “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6). Christ’s purpose was to feed us, not with physical food, not with miracles, but with the Word of God: the true food that nourishes and feeds us to eternal life, and not merely for this brief, temporary one.

III. This is one of the points that the parable of our Gospel teaches. It shows us what Christ’s work truly is. Do you remember what Pastor Sparley preached on last week? The parable of laborers in the vineyard. There Christ shows us how God rules his kingdom: by grace, or by his undeserved love in Christ. For God gives us what we don’t deserve in Christ: forgiveness and mercy. Today’s Gospel continues where last week left off. Here we see how God brings us into his kingdom, how he brings us to realize that God our Father truly loves us in Christ. It shows us that Christ, in his ministry on earth, and still today, through his holy Christian church, does the work of a sower of seed, or of a farmer. He spreads seed throughout the earth, that is, he spreads his word throughout the whole world, calling everyone to faith in him: to believe that he is the Son of God, in whom the world has forgiveness of sins, life, and resurrection from the dead.

IV. This parable contains a comfort and an encouragement. The comfort is the first part of the parable: it shows us how Christ deals with us. He is a farmer or sower who spreads his seed freely, desiring every seed to grow and prosper. So we see that Christ spreads his word to all, that we may all have life to the full. And the encouragement is the second part of the parable: it encourages us to hold fast onto the Word of God against everything that may come our way. For it shows us that not every seed will grow; some will wither away. Not because Christ did not want them to grow: but because various things hindered their growth: the power of the devil, represented by the seed that was trampled; the temptations of the world, represented by the seed that was rooted on rock; and the pleasures and cares of the world, represented by the seed that got choked by thorns. But those who hold fast to the Word of God endure through all of these things; they grow and prosper in Christ, who sustains his people against all these troubles.

V. There is one detail from the Gospel that I want to focus on. It deals with the comforting picture that Christ gives us about his Word. It’s a seed. That’s a very fitting picture. Think of a seed. Outwardly, it might look no different than a lifeless rock or pebble. If you cut a seed open,

it doesn't look particularly full of life or power. But when a seed is planted and watered, over time, it grows into a beautiful plant. And eventually this plant grows many beautiful fruits.

VI. This is exactly how God's Word is. Outwardly, the Word does not look like it has much power: but inwardly, beyond our reason or senses, it contains the power to give forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and join a person to Christ by faith. Because the Word of God lays before us all of the promises that Christ has to offer us. They're simple promises: God created you. God loves you. God has forgiven your sins in Christ. God will bring you back to life after you die. They're not fancy philosophical teachings. They don't give you riches and power and glory in this world. But through them, God takes your heart and joins it to his Son Jesus. By nature, you would never have come to these promises. By nature, you would never have come to God yourself. But the Word of God did this alone. Outwardly, the Word looks like nothing, especially to the World. But to us who believe, we see that it is God's power, as Paul says in Romans 1: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God to all who believe."

VII. There's another aspect of this picture of the seed that is comforting. A seed is something that grows and prospers over time. Sometimes it takes months, years, even decades, for a seed to grow into a beautiful plant. No one plants a fruit tree, and goes out the next morning expecting fruit. That's how seeds work. They take time. They take patience. But the wait is worth it.

VIII. We live in a fast-paced world. Don't you think? Think of the recent news of the conflict building up between Russia and Ukraine. (May God save us from war.) It's astonishing how quickly news gets released about the developments of the conflict at the Ukrainian border. Apparently with the snap of a satellite-camera, NATO countries could see the army building up. And instead of having to wait weeks or months for the news to spread, for newspapers to print and get shipped, in an instant, I can have a notification on my phone, about what President Biden or Putin said only minutes ago. Life seems to travel so fast.

IX. As a result, we tend to become used to quick and fast things. And if things don't work quickly — they might be broken. And at times we might even think that our faith should work the same way. That God in Christ should deal with us in a quick, fast way. And when he doesn't, well — maybe something's wrong with my faith. God's Word is a seed. It takes time to grow. And at times, it's hard for us to wait.

X. But in a sense, this isn't anything new. When it comes to religion especially, I think people have always wanted a quick fix to our spiritual, moral, and mortal problems. That's why magic was such a prevalent thing in the past—and still is in some parts of the world today. That's why the nations of Canaan, before the Israelites entered the land, were resorting to horrible religious practices, to try to convince their gods to send them rain. To the natural way of thinking, waiting for God is simply less appealing than getting a quick fix from him.

XI. Even the Israelites struggled waiting for God. At the beginning of the Exodus, they saw God perform many mighty works, and effect rapid change in Egypt. They were delivered from slavery by God through Moses. They saw the wonders that Moses performed. God drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea. How he divided the Sea in two parts so they could walk through it. Then they get to Mt. Sinai. Moses goes up to receive the law for 40 days. They were waiting for him to come back, and began to doubt if he would. So Aaron, Moses' brother, lets the people

build idols to worship. Then fast forward to when they left Sinai, and began their march to Canaan. Their journey was hard. They were on the move with all their family members—grandparents and little children. They didn't have a big RV for their cross-country trip: they were walking, setting up camp and breaking it down every day. They had to wait to get to the Promised Land. And they struggled with this. As the books of Moses tell us, they frequently complained, even to the point of sometimes wishing they were still in Egypt.

XII. Waiting for God is hard. Open up your books of Psalms, and look at all the prayers of God's people, as they struggle waiting for God. The seed of God's word has been planted in our hearts. We have the forgiveness of sins here and now, by faith in Christ. But our eternal life is waiting for us in the future. Sin still lives in us. We're still mortal people. We're often burdened by the cares, troubles, and responsibilities of this life. When will we be free from sin? When will we no longer be mortal? When will we be free from trouble and care, and live in endless peace and happiness? God's Word promises to give us all these things: when will receive them? The answer: Soon. Wait. Be patient. Hold on to Christ through the Word.

XIII. I think it's natural to come to church and to hear God's Word and expect immediate relief or some immediate change in our life. And this can happen, certainly: but I think we all know from experience that this often does not happen. Or at least, we don't feel that it has happened. We come to church, the pastors say my sins are forgiven, they teach me about Christ and the Gospel, and I receive the Sacrament. I go out the door: and am I really different? Is my life really better? Wouldn't I feel less tired right now if I slept in today instead of coming to church?

XIV. Be comforted when these thoughts come to your mind. The Word of God is a seed. Every time you come to church and hear the Word, Christ, your gracious Lord is watering the seed in your heart, in a way that you can't right now observe. But Christ sees. And he is happy about the person that he is forming you to be. He knows the goal, and he sees it, since he is the Lord of the universe and of all time. We can't always see the effects of God's Word: but Christ does.

XV. Don't worry about the here-and-now, when it comes to Christ and his Word. When a person invests a significant amount of money into something, he doesn't worry about individual moments, or days, or even months. People who invest money in a wise way, do so with the distant future in mind. Until he reaches his goal, there are lots of bumps along the way: the economy grows or falls, inflation rises or decreases. But if an investor is pressing on, along the wise path, these things don't concern him. Think in this way. Hold onto the Word, with the future in mind. No matter the ups and downs in life. Christ, as he waters the seed of his word in your heart, has many future things in mind for you.

XVI. "Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings to closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12). Let Christ's mind be in you. He patiently endured the course of his life, even though he knew what was coming up: crucifixion and death. And he did this, because he knew what was his crucifixion would obtain, and what would come up after his crucifixion. By his crucifixion he would save the world: he would save you. And after his death, he would rise back to life again, and be seated in glory at the Father's right hand.

XVII. That same resurrection and glory, Christ wants to share with you. He gives you a foretaste of them in his Word, as you come and as the seed of his word is watered in your heart. But the fulness of that resurrection and glory—that comes later. He’s working to bring you there. Gradually, over time, as he continues to water the seed of his Word in your heart. Wrap your fingers tightly around Christ and his word. And don't let go — no matter what happens. And Christ will deliver you from all the things that seek to uproot the Word in your heart: from the devil, from temptation, and from the pleasures and riches of this world. Amen.