

SERMON

Pastor James Bauman
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, Illinois
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, A - July 12, 2026

Isaiah 55:10-13 Romans 8:12-17 Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23

We all have seen some very hopeful signs of a Christian revival in our country recently--

- especially among groups of young people,
- and also in more and more public figures affirming their
- Christian roots and personal faith with its Christian values.

Yet these are times that have and are still leading many Christians

- to become spiritually DISCOURAGED.

It's hard to avoid the pressure.

- Maybe it has happened to you.
- It can happen just by listening to the daily news.
- In spite of and along with the hopeful signs,
- our society that has become more and more like that of a pagan world .

Church attendance has shrunken

- Countless children growing up in what WAS a predominately Christian nation,
- are still NOW growing up
- without ever even hearing even basic beloved Bible stories.

Such discouraging facts affect

- not only the normal person who sits in the pew,
- along with congregations' lay leaders.

Also great numbers of pastors

- whose churches have been struggling to adjust and survive in recent years
- have felt overwhelmed and drained of energy....

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel tells us to expect

- that the same Word which will not be received
- at all by some,
- or have any deep, enduring roots in others,
- or is choked by the wild weeds and thorns around it in others....
- STILL DOES ITS WORK.

That which falls on good ground,

- will be producing an abundant harvest,
- in spite of that discouraging ground all around that resists it....

Another very ENCouraging passage that fairly jumps out of the page

- is in the Old Testament Reading today:

"...So shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but SHALL ACCOMPLISH that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."...

The Word of God is much, much more

- than some printed words on the pages

- of a too-often dust covered book.

- It is active, alive, at work, doing things.

And we need always to remember

- especially when we are tempted to be discouraged,

- that it is not at all a matter of OUR saving the Word

- from those who despise it

- and mock it

- and try to destroy it.

The same treatment once was focused

- on the Word of God in flesh, our Lord Jesus,

- when He walked on earth...

So the reasons for discouragement are not new at all.

But as our Lord Jesus rose from the dead,

- so the Word of God can never be sealed in a man-made tomb.

To flatter ourselves into thinking it is up to us

- to save the Word of God as some are tempted to think`

- is just plain SILLY.

The Word saves US, not the other way around.

Of course, we ARE responsible for ourselves--

- and certainly need to examine the ground of our own hearts,

- to see that it is not resisting the Word by our thinking or behavior,
- but allowing it to work the faith in us
- which it is given to create and sustain.

That includes not trying to alter that saving Word

- to suit our supposedly “more enlightened” understanding
- or our preferred life styles...
- which is really to change God’s Word into our OWN words.

But what could be more DIScouraging

- than to think it is somehow up to us
- easily worn down,
- weak and stumbling sinners
- to save the Word of God.

Other passages came to mind again and again

- as I thought about this sermon.

And the fact that I was remembering itself reminded me

- that the Word of God works like that.
- The Holy Spirit brings the Word to our mind
- as Jesus promised,
- just when we need to remember it--
- and we are strengthened and guided-- renewed.

Even those passages we may have thought were so difficult

- to put into our memories
- as many of us were being taught them as children
- now come into our memories
- at just the right time.

Speaking of remembering,

- how about the words of our Lord Jesus Himself--
- teaching us not to be surprised
- by what is happening in our present world
- but to expect it,
- and to be prepared for it:

“And then many will fall away.... And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because LAWLESSNESS will be increased, the LOVE of many will grow cold. *(Isn't that a combination we are seeing right now?)* But the one who endures to the end will be saved. AND THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”

- Matthew 24:10-1

The Word-- the Gospel-- will continue to do its work ,

- and when ITS work has been completed,
- then the end will come.

It is seed which looks so small and unimpressive,

- and at times its sowing seems to be to us such a lowly thing,
- that to spend our important time doing that
- as the Church of Jesus Christ,
- can itself seem to be off-putting,
- and even sometimes just plain useless.....

It's helpful to keep in mind that the very first Christians

- lived in a society much like that which ours has largely become.

They did not allow the pressures of that society to change THEM.

Their foolish sounding message-- the Gospel--

- completely transformed THAT PAGAN SOCIETY,
- in which, for example,
- unwanted baby girls had been regularly discarded
- thrown out into the streets,
- some to be taken to be raised as prostitutes.

At times in history

- such transformations are needed even in Christian nations,
- as various changing circumstances lead many to fall away,
- or are not taught the Gospel at all.

It's happened before in our own nation.

- The frontier, as it was expanding,

- was a wild and largely godless place.

Missionaries on horseback,

- and later in railway cars,

- turned things around.

In graduate school,

- I did a concentration in 19th Century English Church History.

- I recognize that may sound boring, but I found it fascinating.

And just this last week I was reading an article about those days

- when a nation that was largely Christian

- had been overwhelmed by the number of people going to the cities

- as the result of the Industrial Revolution.

The churches, which were organized with parish boundaries,

- so that each church had a specific area of responsibility,

- suddenly had thousands of people in their parishes

- that needed pastoral care.

But the very well-organized church

- was not organized to meet this new reality

- and did not have the resources to serve such numbers.

Listen to this description of the conditions back then by Thomas Guthrie,

- a young pastor who deeply cared for children.

- He made a tour of his district and reported the following:

“I wandered whole days without ever seeing a Bible, or indeed any book at all. I often stood in rooms bare of any furniture; where father, mother, and half a dozen children had neither bed nor bedding, unless a heap of straw and dirty rags huddled in a corner could be called so. I have heard the wail of children crying for bread, and their mother had none to give them....

“I have known a father turn his step-daughter to the street at night-- bidding the sobbing girl who bloomed into womanhood, earn her bread there as others were doing. I have bent over the foul pallet of a dying lad to hear him whisper how his father and mother-- who were sitting half drunk by the fireside-- had pulled the blankets off his body to sell them for drink. I have seen children whitened like plants growing in a cellar.... When they cry, they are not kissed but beaten... I don't recollect of ever seeing a mother in these wretched dwellings bouncing her infant, or of hearing the little creature laugh as he leapt with joy. There, infants have no toys, and mothers' smiles are as rare as sunshine (*in the smoke-filled skies*),”

Thomas Guthrie went on to open what were called “ragged schools”

- and fed children who attended.

- He was involved in fighting alcoholism,

- improving housing, calling for work laws.

And all the while he preached faithfully,

- the Word that flows from God's own amazing,

- COSTLY care for us sinners.

- Hundreds of lives were salvaged through his work.

Through his work and many other faithful pastors and Christian workers,

- England in those days was led to a restoration of its Christian heritage .

The purpose of this sermon is to remind us all

- never ever to give up spiritually.

Despair-- losing hope in God's mercy-- is the worst kind surrender.

- The overwhelming corpse-like effect of despair
- has the effect of hardening the ground of our hearts to the Word of God.

“Be still, and know that I am God,”

- the Lord commands through the Psalmist....

At this time of year, I recall how as a boy growing up in the country,

- if I listened quietly,
- I could hear the corn fields crackle as the crops grew.
- It was an amazing sound.

Take the Lord Jesus at His Word

- and start listening for that quiet miracle in your own life--
- and in the lives of others.

If you are still, YOU can hear things growing--

- even right where you are,
- even in you.
- growth not of your creating.

Put another way...

- How would you be different today if
- you had never heard

- or received the Word of God--
- if the seed had NOT been planted in you?.....

The CONTEXT of this parable is very important for its meaning.

In the three chapters that come before this parable in Matthew's Gospel, there is a record of

- set-backs,
- frustrations,
- unreceptive hearers,
- and barriers
- to the efforts of Jesus Himself and His disciples to proclaim the kingdom.

They were the kinds of things

- that would put both Jesus and His disciples themselves in danger
- of becoming very discouraged.

So... Jesus told this parable

- in order to ENCOURAGE His true followers.

The point is that IN SPITE OF DIFFICULTIES,
- the growth and the harvest DOES come.

Those in whom that Word works

- ARE what they could never be without it.
- and they DO things they could never do without it,
- very often surprising themselves.

As a pastor,

- I have been privileged to see that surprise take place on many occasions.

Believers grow and produce fruit--

- fruit that makes life worthwhile,

- and which is eternal.

No, their lives are not without problems and failings.

Yes, there are still old, ground-hardening sin-laden habits.

But don't let such noisy realities cover up the crackling sounds.

- The very fact that we are sometimes troubled

- by the slowness of growth in ourselves and others

- or may even wonder if our faith is dead and gone

- is a sign that we are alive in spite of the biggest discouragement.

And living things are ALWAYS growing.

- God continues His work--

- in, with and under all the noise

- that is generated by the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh--

- noise that would prevent us from noticing.

So today let's resolve to WEED OUT negativism about what God is doing

- and instead with a prayer for the power of God's Holy Spirit,

- pull up by the roots thorns of discouragement.

- His own gracious power IS at work in our lives-- STILL.

As we realize THAT God-given reality

- we will have our mouths and our inner being filled

- with the garden-fresh,

- tasty praise of Him who is gracious and patient enough to

- to do His work also among US--

- right in the midst of all the noise around us.

Let everyone of you who has ears listen today.

- Be encouraged!

- That's the will of the Lord Jesus FOR YOU,

- and for our life together around the Word,

- and around the Word made Flesh Himself who meets us here.

“(My Word) shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

- also for you.