

Our Lord's Word goes before him and after him. He is bound so closely to his Word that he promises to be wherever even two or three gather in his name. He gives his body and blood in the bread and the wine wherever his Supper is distributed and eaten according to his Word and command. His work by which he won forgiveness and salvation for all people is inseparable from his Word through which he delivers this forgiveness and salvation by his Holy Spirit. So if we have his Word, we can be sure that we have everything he has done for us. We have his work, his compassion, his suffering, death, atonement, and resurrection. We have his baptism, his Spirit, his body and blood, his righteousness, his kingdom, and his very life. Our Lord's Word brings with it everything he is and everything he has done. His Word goes before him and after him.

It's for this reason that Jesus told Paul that his strength is perfected in weakness. Jesus already died in weakness. In his work on earth, he set his face toward Jerusalem where he carried the guilt of all mankind and reconciled sinners to the living God. There, in his passion, he bore the beatings, the mocking, the whips, and all the mistreatment of wicked men. He died in weakness, and his strength to save sinners was perfected in this weakness.

So now, in his Word, he continues to bear with our weakness. All the while, he assures us that his strength is perfected in weakness. Just as he suffered rejection and hostility from this world, his Word continues to be scorned and attacked, despised and even ignored. Jesus suffered and died for us. It follows that his Word remains with us in our suffering. The Word of God continues to suffer rejection from this world. Jesus said to his disciples, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me."

To be clear, the Word does not suffer to make atonement for us. Our Lord has already made the atonement. He is no longer suffering in his body. As he hung on the cross, having fulfilled God's law and will, having made atonement for the sins of all people of all time, he cried out, "It is finished!" Christ is no longer in his passion. His suffering and death once and for all has made satisfaction for our sins and established peace with the Father.

But his Word does continue to bear with us in this dying world. And in doing so, his Word continues to be rejected, trampled, mistreated, abused, and despised. Just as Christ himself was rejected and abused in his suffering and death, people continue to reject and abuse his Word. Yet, just as Christ was not left in the grave but was raised from the dead, his Word always accomplishes what it sets out to do. Despite the scorns, the insults, and the apathy from the field, God's Word always overcomes, working faith in the human hearts where and when God pleases. Through his Word, the Holy Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian church on earth and keep it with Christ Jesus in the one true faith. It's as Psalm 12 says,

2 Sexagesima – Isaiah 55; 2 Corinthians 11-12; Luke 8

The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever. (Ps 12:6-7)

The Word of God therefore continues to bear with us and protect us from all spiritual attacks. Through our weakness and our trials, the Word of our Lord proves its strength. God keeps his saints in the faith, producing in them love, joy, peace, patience, and all good fruit.

Jesus therefore gives this parable of the Sower and the seed to demonstrate the patience and endurance of his Word. He himself is the Sower who sows his seed all over the earth. Some reject it out of hand. These are the ones on the road where the birds quickly gobble it up. The devil snatches it out of their hearts immediately. These are the scoffers and mockers, who think that God's Word is out of date and even stupid. They think they are too intelligent to hear what God says. Some of them are kind of smart. They might study science, math, history, or philosophy. But they foolishly fail to recognize that God knows all things, has arranged all things, has guided all history, and has put all human wisdom to shame. They laugh at the concept of God becoming flesh and dying for sinners. They ignore and downplay the threat and wickedness of sin and their need for repentance. They therefore trample the Word of God underfoot, leaving themselves with no hope for eternal life.

Others hear the Word for a while, but they don't plant any deep roots. These are the ones on the rocky soil. At first, they are excited about Jesus being their Savior. They enjoy the feeling of peace, which the gospel certainly gives. But they don't see their need to learn from their Savior. They remain so immature that whenever anyone comes preaching in Jesus' name, they drink it all in without discerning whether this is truly Jesus' teaching. Meanwhile, they just keep chasing that feel-good high that they felt when they first believed. When they have a hard time grasping what our Lord teaches, then they just ignore it. They claim that it isn't relevant or practical. It doesn't fulfill their felt needs. They only want positive affirmation, so they can't handle any criticism or correction from God's Word.

Once their faith is challenged, they fall away. Maybe they hear someone from the road spout off easily refuted foolishness, like that Jesus never claimed to be God, that the Scriptures are an invention of the Church, that the Bible doesn't preach against this or that popular sin promoted by this godless age, or that if God is so good and powerful then they should not have to suffer in this life. All of these claims are easily refuted just by learning the Bible, but those who are among the rocks are too impatient to learn and grow in the knowledge of God's Word. They can't handle the idea that they don't immediately understand the gospel. Therefore, once they are challenged, they get offended and lose their hope in God's promise of life.

3 Sexagesima – Isaiah 55; 2 Corinthians 11-12; Luke 8

Others are in the soil with the thorns. They learn God's Word, get to know the doctrine, maybe even dive deeply into it. But the pleasures and worries of this life prove to be more important to them. They care more about the length of the sermon and service than they do about the content of the sermon and service. They'd rather get along and fit in than remain faithful to God's Word. And like those who are in the rocky ground, they become unable to receive correction. Their worldly cares overwhelm them and choke away their faith.

Yet, through it all, God's Word still manages to bear fruit. Despite being trampled on, rejected, and forgotten, the gospel of our Savior still shines through the darkness. As much as Christ is warning us against scoffing, mocking, shallowness, impatience, and apathy, he is also affirming that his Word will not return empty. Though it's true that those who are wise in their own eyes find no use for the message of Christ and his redemption in their lives, his words of grace continue to comfort those who are poor in spirit. Those who realize their need for salvation, who have seen the mocking and scorn for God's Word even within their own sinful flesh, who mourn their own sin and unworthiness – these ones learn from God himself to be honest about their own sinful condition. And his Word remains with them despite their weakness. While they bear temptations and testing, God's Word proves true and faithful for them.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by the hostility toward God's Word, then don't despair. If you realize that you yourself experience impatience and even apathy toward God's Word, then don't give in to it. Have you grumbled against God's truth when your faith is being challenged? Then by all means, be honest about your ignorance and weakness. But don't lose sight of what God's Word is doing to you. God is simply applying his fatherly discipline on you. He is teaching you to repent and to bear your cross.

Just as Christ patiently bore his cross, he remains patient with you through his words of grace. He doesn't abandon you to your own shallowness, ignorance, and hopeless temptations. Instead, his strength is proven as he opens your ears to hear his Word. He uses all of your trials and afflictions in this life to drive you closer to his promise so that you would continue to receive his words of pardon and peace with faith.

What Christ accomplished for you by his obedient suffering and death is freely delivered to you by his Word. His body and blood still give you the certainty of his promise of pardon, peace, and salvation. He who died and rose for you also covered you in your baptism, and by his Word he remains with you under ever cross you must bear. He remains your shield both behind you and in front of you. You can therefore be confident that his Word will not return empty. Amen.