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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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## **The Word Battles the Elements In Our Lives**

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

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### ***Matthew 13:1-9,18-23***

*On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

*<sup>3</sup> Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

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*<sup>18</sup> "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. <sup>20</sup> But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. <sup>22</sup> Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."*

Now neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field; may God give the increase according to His word. Amen.

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

It is a scattered crowd from all walks of life; a mixed bag of sorts. They come from all around to hear Him. Imagine the sight. Jesus and His disciples leave the house where they were staying and head toward the shores of Galilee. As they walk, the crowd

which was with them in the house gradually grows. They come from the surrounding villages; they make their way through the surrounding hills and reach the shoreline. They've heard something about Him, but want to hear more. They've heard how this teacher from Nazareth speaks with authority – how He opposes the traditions of the religious leaders and speaks much of God's kingdom. They've heard of his power to work miracles: it is said that He casts out demons and heals the lame. And so they gather upon the shore line, a mixed crowd from every walk of life. They gather to hear what He has to say – and yet, how many will hear Him?

There are so many that He cannot address them all at once; He calls for James and John to bring their boat. He puts out a little from shore and the crowds begin to grow silent. A hush falls over the multitudes as Jesus speaks. The surrounding hills amplify His voice. It is as if He surrounds them.

What sort of people are in those crowds? Where do they come from? What are their stories, their struggles, their sins – what are the experiences that have that shape their thinking on matters of religion? As Jesus looks out over this crowd of people that line the shore, He finds different stories of different people and His voice surrounds them: "He to has ears to hear, let him hear." His Word goes into action, battling the elements in our lives.

The picture Jesus draws of a farmer sowing seed would resonate with a 1st century Palestinian. The varied elements Jesus mentions were typical of a Jewish farm. A farmer in Jesus' day didn't plant in rows or dig a spot for each seed like you might in your garden. His field was divided into various plots of space, with paths running in between. As he walks along he scatters the seed back and forth as he goes. Some fall on the paths, some on the plot. And he worked with the elements he was given. His land may be very rocky. It may be infested with thorns and thistles. And in rare cases, it is a farm with good, well cultivated soil. In an arid region like Palestine, with the hilly, often rocky terrain, farming was challenging – a battle against the elements.

So the hymn-writer, Martin Franzmann, writes:

The sower sows; his reckless love  
Scatters abroad the goodly seed,  
Intent alone that there may be  
The wholesome loaves that people need.

It is a reckless and busy word that Jesus scatters about. It falls upon the crowd – a mixed sort, people with different stories; different experiences; different struggles – all

desperately in need of His Word. For His Word alone can battle the elements that plague us and threaten God's eternal harvest. But will they hear Him?

Look out over that crowd; look and see what Jesus sees.

He sees a man standing, listening impatiently – a man who listens, but only for so long. He has already made up his mind that church is not for him. No one has ever leant him a helping hand; and he doesn't want help any way – he doesn't need this Jesus of Nazareth. He doesn't need God. You see, He remembers dealing with churches in the past and they cannot be trusted. When he was a teenager, his pastor was caught embezzling hundreds of dollars weekly into a private account in his name. There were Christians he used to look up to only to find they were hypocrites; they were worse than he was. His path was trampled under foot.

In fact, I met it was this sort of man whom I came across last week. I was out delivering flyers and saw this man out trimming his lawn. He was moving his truck from one side of the driveway to the other as I approached. After avoiding being run over I tried to hand him a flyer. As soon as the word "church" came off my lips, he was not interested: "I don't deal with churches." The word fell on a hardened path – a path that had been walked on and trampled under to the point that this seed was snatched away by the devil before it even had a chance. There was no understanding; no care for what this message might mean or what answer Jesus might have. I couldn't even finish my sentence before I was talking to his back and he was walked away. The seed was snatched away.

The Word moves onward. We look out and with the eyes of Jesus we see another. Another stands in the crowd, along the shore, listening intently. She is only child – a 2nd grader and she has come to visit our church's VBS. Her parents are thankful for the free child care. Never mind that. She loves it. This is the first she has really ever learned of Jesus. She asks questions; she does the crafts; she sings the songs with all her heart. The joy of the gospel of salvation has filled her and she can't wait to ask her parents when she can come again.

As the years go on, they do send her again. She comes again and once more after that, but that is it. After that, its off to high school, off to college. She grows up and begins to forget the joy that once filled her. The word is but a faint echo on the hillside. Other things are on her mind. Soon after high school her parents divorce. At least they waited. Still she doesn't see how this could have happened. On top of this, her mother contracts cancer is becomes deathly ill. Her dad is now no where to be found. Only she is left to take care of her. She has to quit college and move back in with her mother.

All the while the voices are challenging her faith, robbing her of the spiritual nourishment she needs right now. Whispers against God and His goodness have come to her lips. She can't see why this has all happened and doesn't see what God can do to help her. And just like that, she stumbles. She stands upon rocky ground where there is no root; there is no care from God's people or God's word in her life, there is no pastor to visit her, no Christian friend to talk with her; here she stands, in a wasteland of tribulation, exposed to the elements which scorch her faith to death.

So the Word moves onward. Scattered throughout the crowd, the voice of Jesus falls upon the ears of another. We see a woman listening, trying to decipher what Jesus is talking about. The word falls on her heart and she wants to become a Christian. She wants to get God into her life and to become a better person. Yet, at the same time as she hears His word, she really does not hear Him at all. She cannot bear to hear it. The cost is too great.

The word calls her to abandon her sinful lifestyle. Jesus calls to her, telling her that living with this other man is an offense to Him and His name. She knows neither of them are ready for marriage; yet she can't think of moving out? He makes way more than she does and she can never afford to live on her own. Where would she go? What would she have to give up? Would she have to move back with her parents? Would she have to give up her job, lose her cable tv, her internet, her car, her friends?

Not only that but he's not a Christian and his lifestyle rubs off on her more than her Christian influence rubs off on him. She thinks she can do it. She can withstand temptation. She can live both lives. She wants to become a better person, and she tells herself that having church in her life will make her feel better about herself. But it doesn't. It is not meant to do this at all. The word does not make us into better people, it makes us into repentant, forgiven people. The deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this world have infested her life and there is no room left for Christ. The cares of this world begin to drown out what Jesus is saying to her. There are thorny issues she does not want to face, pain of dealing with guilt, sacrifices that are too costly, and pretty soon, her faith is choked to death. There is no fruit. Faith without works is dead and this faith without fruits of repentance is no faith at all. It withers and dies.

So goes the word. It lands here and there. It touches this life and that. And Jesus wants us to know that we cannot always expect the same results.

He continues to scan the crowd; He scatters His word abroad recklessly and sees that this very same word has fallen on yet another ear. The word touches another, and as

Jesus looks out over this crowd, there He sees you. He sees you sitting there in that pew, on that shoreline, His word echoing all around.

You face the same dangers, the same prospect of death. The very same elements that threatened 1st century Palestinians, threaten your faith. The word is scattered in it falls upon a life which is no better than the others – a life which, of itself, is no better than the man who has had bad experiences dealing with Christians; a life which has faced your own set of tribulations – just like the girl whose parents are divorced and who is left alone, caring for a mom with cancer; and a sinful flesh which, of itself, is no better – no better than the woman who lives a double life – who goes to church on Sunday, and returns to sin on Monday. If you are no different than what is the difference?

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. The difference is you have been given ears to hear. You are hearing that word and “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). And God’s word is “like the rain from heaven which waters the earth and makes it bring forth and bud” (Isaiah 55:10). And you recognize that “all flesh is grass: it withers, it fades;” that your sinful flesh cannot stand the elements that surround it; and you turn to something that will endure – for the Word of the Lord is what endures forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Jesus scans the crowd and His word falls on your ears, and His seed enters your heart. You see, God is the God of creation. He is the God of cultivation. As we read responsively in our psalm of the day: “You, O God of our salvation, You visit the earth and water it; You soften it with showers and bless its growth; You crown the year with Your goodness; and Your ways overflow with plenty” (Psalm 65:9-13). This is the God of creation; this is the God of cultivation.

God creates the good soil. His is the work of a farmer: to break up the fallow ground; to cultivate the hardened heart; the heart crowded with weeds; He reaches into our lives of thorns and thistles, to pull out the evil and create something good.

And He does it through His Son Jesus Christ. We cannot withstand the elements of this world and this life. The evil that pervades in this world also infests our sinful hearts. It leaves us parched, in need of rescue, in need of Christ. And He comes to cultivate us in the word.

“He who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” As Isaiah writes, His word accomplishes what He pleases and prospers in the thing for which He sent it.

And the word was sent; the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The scars on His hands prove His labor. His hands reached into our thorn stricken world and rooted out all sin, all evil, death itself and the scars on his hands show the work of God in our creation. Human hands. It is a human who stands in that boat, a man who speaks with the voice of God. It is a man's hands raised on that cross, yet the voice of God's Son cries out: It is finished. The empty tomb shows the recreative work of God's hands. Your sins are forgiven. In the resurrection, the Word restores all things to what they should be and suddenly you are growing, fruit is coming forth.

The kingdom is a power hidden in the word; a power that cannot be reasoned. He who has ears, let him hear. It prospers in the purpose for which God sent it. And that purpose is not to make our lives comfortable, not to remove every trouble that might come our way, not to make things easier – but to give us faith.

We are a mixed bag; a crowd of people with different elements that threaten our faith: different struggles, different sins and sufferings; yet the answer is common to all our situations – when you've been let down by other Christians, in the midst of divorce and sickness, when the cost of discipleship seems too hard to bear and your sins overwhelms you – the answer is there in that boat, from the mouth of Jesus. So that you understand that when you are let down by another Christian, you are not let down by God; so that when you face the prospect of divorce or you are suffering through a situation that seems to offer no resolution, God's promise is with you; so that when you are bearing guilt and repentance comes at a great cost, the Word declares your sins forgiven.

The answer is to hear Him; to keep on hearing Him – not just once and a while; not even just once a week – but every day: in daily prayers and devotions; in sermons, Bible Classes, VBS, SS; in words of comfort to those who suffer; in words of rebuke to those who are sinning; in words of forgiveness to those who are laden with guilt; in words of hope to those who are hopeless. For there in the word of Christ His kingdom reigns and He saves us by faith.

Rooted deeply in the Word we can withstand the elements and we will bear abundant fruit.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.