

God's Word meets with Resistance

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday before Lent

Sermon Text: Luke 8:4-15



⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ And the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to Him, "To you, I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'" ⁹ And he took Him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and

said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "'He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹ and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. ¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country.

The parable above tells of a sower who sows his seed three times on the wrong soil. The story that Jesus tells us is not a story of success. You could even say that the sower did something illogical. It is clear to every child that you can't just throw your seed on the street. Just as everyone knows that you must first pull out the weeds before sowing so that the young plants can grow. And who will throw his seed on a hard stone? The question that is asked by this parable is the following: Why can't the sower be more economical and throw all the seed onto fertile ground instead of wasting it three times in a row? What Jesus tells us here is shocking because we notice very soon that Jesus is telling a parable: and yet God is the sower who so illogically throws His seed, that is His Word, everywhere. Jesus wants to tell us that the preaching of God's Word is not a story of success. This is shocking because here the living God is at work and remains unsuccessful. God scatters, laboring and struggling against much resistance. And He has been doing this for thousands of years. But God remains mostly unsuccessful. Yes, we heard that right. God's work with us human beings lands mostly on rocky, impenetrable ground and is therefore unsuccessful. The One who created heaven and earth through His Word, comes up against a hard, irresistible limit. It's about the sins of the people. God's Word remains unsuccessful against this sin. However, a question irresistibly imposes itself on us. Am I such a rocky ground where God's Word can't grow? Do you know how it is when God's Word is unsuccessful with you? Yes, we know that all very well! A Word of God passes over me. I hear the words, yet don't understand. It doesn't affect me. It's like the news that I listen to while cleaning the house. After 5 minutes, I already don't know what was

said. According to Jesus' parable: The Word of God is immediately eaten by the birds. But we know the next scenario, too. Suddenly a Word of God hits me. I notice that I am being addressed here. The Word seems to speak directly and unmistakably to a sin that I got caught up in. I listen attentively.... I realize that it is something serious. Can it be that I got into a very dangerous thought? Can it be that the dangerous thought didn't only stay as a thought but also already bore its evil fruit? Or has Satan for quite some time stretched a whole network of thoughts, deeds, and disorders around me so that I sink even deeper and I get tangled up in sin? I listen closely. I make myself a little worried. But then the phone rings and the thought is gone again. God's word is like a seed that falls on the ground. At first it seems to grow and a whole new green branch sees the light of day. But the root has a problem. It meets a cold stone and the green branch must die.... In my heart of hearts, I don't want to change. When it comes to it, I persistently and without stopping want only what I want and not what God wants from me. But I also know the third scenario. The Word of God gets penetrates my heart. I realize that I must change. I take it seriously. I even get on my knees immediately, confess my sins, and want to better myself from now on... And then, it's a tragedy. I am again drawn into the chaos of friends and the hectic pace of everyday life. The new plant grows only a short time before it is choked and killed by the weeds. These are the things that come up as opposition against God's Word. We know this all too well. And yet God doesn't give up. He remains persistent. He remains faithful. Against wind and weather, He knows that some could fall on good ground. Even if it's only a single seed. His fruit will be rewarded inexorably a hundredfold with good fruit. What Jesus describes in this parable is the story of God's Word in this world. It has always been like that. People pursued false prophets. And the right prophets--those who brought up God's unwieldy Word—they mercilessly killed. Jesus Christ Himself was unsuccessful. They persecuted Him. In the end, even His closest friends left Him. He remained alone. He, with the thief on the cross. And yet, just like the sower, Jesus carried on relentlessly, patiently, and with great effort. Jesus did that with such love and dedication that across centuries and through the lines of Scripture, we perceive the warmth and love. Jesus doesn't care about large numbers. If Jesus hadn't died for the whole world, but only for the one thief on the cross, then he would have done everything exactly the same. Just for this one man. He came to find the lost sheep. And if it were even only one, then he would have done everything exactly the same.

And we also know the other scenario: the one seed that falls on fertile soil, that penetrates deeply into the heart and bears fruit. A hundredfold... So it was with the story of the Word of God. Who would have thought that Jesus on the cross was at the climax of His mission? Who would have thought that later, the message of His resurrection would be spread throughout the whole world? Who would have thought that this message would still call, comfort, and create new life into the 21st century? Who would have thought that people would hear this Word also in our time and leave everything behind to follow Jesus? Even if they must pay for it with their own lives. God's Word, where it falls on fertile soil, bears fruit a hundredfold. That should give us hope and confidence today. Even if God's Word meets with hard ground in my heart, I still want to listen to this Word, again and again. And even when I fight with sin and often lose against Satan, I constantly want to be strengthened by Jesus and His Word and try again. And in doing so, I want to be a little like this sower. Patiently and against all opposition, I always want to do what the sower did. My confidence remains with steadfast gaze on this seed that still finds fertile soil and will then surprise me a hundredfold.

Also if we want to preach God's Word in our world here in Europe in the 21st Century, we will not let ourselves be deterred by the failure of God's Word. If people haven't already listened to Jesus, then

forget about us. And yet we don't stop there. We must not place all our hope on numbers like some mission friends and mission societies do. That is unbiblical and unchristian. Such a method might be right perhaps for a bank or an advertising agency. But please, not for the Kingdom of God. Let's look to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ and how He toiled away. Once, 6,000 people ran from Him because they didn't understand His speech about bread. Another time, the people from His hometown, Nazareth, almost threw Him from a hill because they couldn't handle His message. And so it went. All the villages around the sea of Galilee mostly rejected Jesus. His own relatives rejected Him. He constantly had to defend Himself against the authorities and pharisees. Who actually keeps putting the idea in our heads that it will be any different for us? Who actually says that mission only makes sense if you can baptize lots of people? We don't do all this to become famous, rich, or great.... do we?

And some fell onto fertile soil.... That's what it was all about for the Lord Jesus. That's what it's about for us too! When we work in the east of Leipzig in "Brücke", we don't experience that people fall to their knees in great swarms, repent, and ask to be baptized. And yet, we want to continue. We don't do it for the large numbers. We do it for the individual. That's who we have in mind. The individual person in whose heart God's Word falls on good soil and suddenly grows and prospers. The individual person, who can be saved. We do it because we know precisely that God's Word is worth it. It brings success after all. Not just once. But a hundredfold. Amen.