

Text: Isaiah 55:10-11. EHV.

8th Sunday after Pentecost.

August 2, 2020.

Grace and peace are yours through God's Word. Amen.

How often do you need to hear something before it sticks? I remember my brother coming home from school one day and saying, "My teacher said, 'A person will remember what another person has said if they say it 2000 times.'" Then when I had that teacher he said the same thing. 2000 times. That sounds like a lot doesn't it? 2000 times? Really? Well, look at the illustration God uses, rain falling on the earth, making it sprout and grow. How often do plants need water? I doubt anybody with a garden waters once and considers it done and if there's no rain, all summer long, not one drop, the gardener doesn't say, "Come on. I watered it once. Should be good, right?" You water over and over. Gardeners, farmers keep track of total rainfall over days, weeks, months. Just as those plants need water over and over, so our hearts need to hear God's Word again and again. We can't say, "I heard it once," or, "I learned that in Catechism class." We need to hear God's Word over and over. We need God's Word to water our hearts again and again. Good thing God does exactly that. God's Word waters hearts again and again. God brings us his Word over and over. So God's Word can water our hearts again and again.

There's really an interesting context to these two verses in front of us. The context is this: God's ways are higher than our ways and God's thoughts are better than our thoughts. Think about this. What's higher than the sky? What's better than rain? Well, when it's on your wedding day, that's ironic. When it's picnic time, you don't like it.

But God's ways are higher than our ways. God's thoughts are better than our thoughts. Who would have thought to care for the earth by this cycle of water? Water that comes from the sky, waters the earth, and then returns back there, to that same sky. God provides in this way, through water. God provides seed to the sower and bread to the eater. God provides daily. God provides in abundance. God provides repeatedly through this cycle of water.

Could we have come up with that? Can we make it rain and then cause that rain to return to the sky? In the same way, who would have thought that God would come to us by his Word, just by that Word? Just by writing down his Word, God is present. Just by someone speaking that Word, God is speaking. Who would have thought of that? Seems so boring today. But God spoke to bring good news to the first people on earth after the very first time they sinned. God spoke and promised a Savior from their sin. Who would have thought that God would send a Savior, God come down from heaven to earth, to die on a cross? What that our thought? Or was this good news God's thought? When Jesus' followers were a small group, just 120 people, God used preaching, one sermon, by one man to bring 3000 people to faith in Jesus. Still today, God uses his Word. God uses preaching to provide an abundance of forgiveness. God uses his Word over and over. God waters our hearts with his love again and again. Just like the rain and the snow come down from the sky.

In the same way is *my* word that goes out from *my* mouth will not return to *me* empty. I trust you heard the emphasis. This is God's Word in the Bible. These are not the words of humans. These are the very words of God! Stop and think about that. This is God's Word! These are not human fantasies, fairy tales, fiction. This is God's true account of the history of the world. This is God loving us enough to tell us his highest way. He sent his Son, Jesus, to be our Savior and rescue us from sin! God's Word doesn't have to change with the times to meet popular opinion. People's ideas have to change to line up with God's

Word.

This is God's Word. It goes out from God's mouth. Have you seen the bumper sticker, "God said it. That settles it." Good slogan, right? God said it. That settles it. Sometimes we need to hear God say it again and again because we don't get it the first time, or the second or the 1999th time. I've lost exact count now, but I've read the entire Bible at least 35 times. And do you know what I'm doing right now? Reading it again. Every year. All the way through. Just for fun. And that Word waters my heart again and again, every time. This is God's Word, from God's mouth.

God's Word can't return to him empty. It can't be fruitless. God's Word can't fail. Someone speaking God's Word can't be empty handed. Just like rain can't make the ground dry, so God's Word can't come back empty. God's Word. From God's mouth. Can't return to God empty.

Can I share a secret with you? That makes me sad. At my own sin. Have I really trusted God's Word, even in a sermon? Or do I think it's my stories and humor and excitement that will make God's Word work? I get upset when someone hears a sermon and all they talk about is peanut butter, or the Seinfeld reference. The sermon wasn't about peanut butter! The sermon was about Jesus! Seinfeld won't get you to heaven! But maybe I was more excited to talk about Seinfeld than about our Savior. Maybe I thought my words were more important than God's Word. God said it that settles it? Really! But God, your words are so outdated. But God, your words are so misogynistic. Your Word doesn't return to you empty? Then why isn't our church growing? Why are other churches that don't preach your truth alive and well and bigger than ours? What are you doing God? Don't you know what's going on here? God knows. He always knows. When those first people sinned and disobeyed God's command, God came to them. And while they were still passing the blame, before they even asked for forgiveness, God spoke. His Word, from his mouth said, "I will send a Savior. He will crush the devil's head." When God's people forgot God's Word, God sent people like Isaiah to speak God's Word. God's Word through Isaiah? The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son and will call him Immanuel, which means God with us. God is with us. That's God's Word. From God's mouth. God's Word, from God's mouth, described this Savior in detail in Isaiah. Pierced for our transgressions. Crushed for our iniquities (transgressions and iniquities are words for sins.) the punishment that brought us peace was upon Jesus. And by Jesus' wounds we are healed, from all our sins, for all eternity! That's God's Word. From God's mouth. Good news! Great news! The best news ever! We have a Savior. We are forgiven! That's God's Word. From God's mouth. Could you ever hear your children say too many times, "I love you"? Could you ever hear it too often, "God our heavenly Father has been merciful to us. Therefore I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? That Word of God, the Gospel, the Good news, waters hearts again and again.

That word accomplishes whatever God pleases. It was fascinating for me to read the original language. Because God talks about all these things as done, completed actions. God's Word has accomplished whatever God pleased. God's Word has succeeded in the purpose for which God sent it. God's Word has done what God pleased. God was pleased to promise a Savior and God sent him. God was pleased to die for the sins of the world. And he died. God is pleased to have his Word spread all over the world. And God is pleased to have you do the spreading. I know it's scary to talk about God's Word. But if you are scared by something and God is pleased by something, what's better to do? Stay scared and do nothing or listen to God's Word, "I am with you"? And then share God's Word! It still makes me nervous to talk about Jesus with someone when I don't know what their reaction will be. But you know what God's

reaction will be? He's pleased! He's delighted when we speak his Word. We are letting God's Word rain down on a heart. God's Word will accomplish what God pleases. God's Word will succeed in the purpose for which God sent it.

Now, let's be clear, God's Word can achieve two main purposes. One certainly is that dry hearts will be watered with the Word and brought to faith and join our church and we'll be together in heaven. And we'll talk more about that. But sometimes God's purpose, for God's Word, from God's mouth is to make the dry heart even drier, the hard heart even harder. Actually, this was the first promise God made to Isaiah. When Isaiah was first called to preach, God got Isaiah pumped up with personal forgiveness and Isaiah gladly volunteered to preach. Isaiah said, "Here am I! Send me!" And do you know the very next words of God, from God's own mouth? "You will preach, but these people won't listen. My purpose is to harden their hearts and make their ears deaf." Thanks God! Can you unsend me? God wants all people to be saved. But sometimes the success of God's Word is leaving people without excuse. Sometimes we think God's Word should always achieve our purpose at our time. I invite a friend to church once and he comes. And he believes happily ever after.

But that isn't always God's idea of success. That isn't always God's purpose. But then I think back to someone I knew who lived near Phoenix, Arizona. He bought a fixer upper. The previous owner didn't water the grass. That's a stupid thing not to do in Phoenix. But there was a water sharing plan in the neighborhood. I don't know the details, but each week you got so many hours to water. And the first week, the water seemed to make no difference on my friend's lawn. The ground was so dry and hard his weekly water made it a few feet. But his father said, "Keep on watering and see how much farther it makes it next week." And so he did. And sure enough, each week, the water got a little farther as it softened more of the ground. The water applied over and over, did its work, achieved its purpose. Maybe one quick shot with the hose isn't enough. Invite your friend again. Friendship Sunday is coming up. Maybe the water of God's Word will make it a little farther this time. Maybe they won't say yes, but they will think about it a little bit more.

I think of Joyce. I met her almost thirty years ago in the inner city of Milwaukee. She had been to church, but somehow the water of God's Word always met a dry heart. Joyce wasn't sure she was going to heaven. But God's Word, from God's mouth, through a young Seminary student, bolted Joyce out of her chair when this water hit her heart for the first time, "I'm going to heaven because Jesus died for me!" God's Word achieves God's purpose. I think of Rickey. He was going by our booth at a rainy fall fest. I tossed him a football. He came over to our booth. He invited me to his house to study the Bible. That one's on a break right now. I pray God's Word will bring Rickey back. I think about Gina, who got a magnet at a parade. We've rained down thousands of magnets and post its over the years. And finally one rained down and achieved God's purpose of bringing Gina to hear more of God's Word. Gina hasn't stopped hearing God's Word. God's Word continues to water her heart, again and again. Don't stop hearing God's Word. It's God's Word! From his mouth! It can't return to him empty! It always achieves God's purpose. God's Word is always successful. God's Word always waters hearts. Amen.