

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

16 July – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 507 197 267 515

INTROIT: Psalm 65:9-13

You have taken care of the land and have caused it to overflow. You have enriched it abundantly. The stream of God is filled with water. You are providing their grain. For that is how You have prepared it.

You have given its furrows their fill of drink and levelled off the edges of its furrows. You soften it with gentle rain and bless its growth.

You have crowned the year of Your goodness, and Your wheel-tracks drip with fat.

The pastures in the desert overflow. The hills are robed with joy.

The meadows are clothed with flocks, and the valleys are covered with grain. They are shouting for joy. Indeed, they are singing.

COLLECT: Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 44:6-8 The LORD is the first and the last.
Romans 8:12-25 The suffering of this present age, and freedom from death in the glorious age to come.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 The righteous will shine like the sun.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

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Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Isaiah 55:10-13

¹⁰ For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not go back there without watering the earth and causing it to bring forth and to sprout, so that it **gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater**, ¹¹ so My Word will be, which goes out of My mouth. It will not return to Me without results but will accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do.”

¹² For you will go out with joy and be led out in peace. The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy in your presence, and all the trees in the field will clap their hands. ¹³ A cypress tree will grow up instead of the thorn-bush, and a myrtle tree will grow up instead of the stinging nettle. This will also make a name for the LORD and become an everlasting sign, which will not be cut off.

Romans 8:12-17

¹² Therefore, fellow-Christians, we are in debt, not to the sinful nature, to live according to the sinful nature. ¹³ For, if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. However, if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s children. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery again, to make you afraid but have received the Spirit, who adopts, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are God’s children, ¹⁷ and that, if we are children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, since indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the sea. ² However, such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while the entire crowd was standing on the shore. ³ Then He told them many things in parables. He said, “Look! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ While he was sowing, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on the stony places, where they did not have much soil. Because their soil was not deep, the seeds came up quickly. ⁶ However, when the sun rose, they were scorched and, because they had no root, they withered. ⁷ Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them. ⁸ However, other seeds fell on the good soil and produced grain, some a hundred, some sixty and some thirty times as much. ⁹ Let the one who has ears listen! ...

¹⁸ “Therefore, hear the parable of the sower! ¹⁹ When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom but does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This one is he who has been sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who has been sown on the stony places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ but does not have root in himself. He lasts for only a short time and, when trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he immediately falls away. ²² The person who has been sown among thorns is one who hears the Word, but the worry of the world and the seduction that comes from riches choke the Word, and it does not produce anything. ²³ However, the person who has been sown on the good soil is the one who hears the Word and understands it, and so produces and yields, sometimes a hundred, sometimes sixty and sometimes thirty times as much.”

OUR WORK WILL NOT BE IN VAIN
Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost 2023
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Being a Christian can be very discouraging, especially when today’s culture has turned against the Christian faith in many ways. Even being a member of a Christian congregation can be difficult. Perhaps we look at the empty pews around us and remember the days when they were overflowing. But it is not only our church – many churches nationwide seem to have to deal with lower attendance and financial difficulties. Being a pastor can be very discouraging when all your work seems to fall on deaf ears, and you wonder where the zeal for the Gospel is, even among your own members. Yes, we can feel discouraged, deflated, and defeated. What’s the use anymore? We’re tempted to give up.

That's why our Gospel reading for today is so timely and needed. In His Parable of the Sower, Jesus gives us a picture of what's happening. This parable helps explain why there can be such meagre results in response to the ministry of the Gospel. Still, at the same time, this parable also encourages us amid our discouragement. It encourages us to know that our work *will not be in vain*.

Jesus uses an *agricultural metaphor* as the vehicle for His parable. Parables were simple stories based on everyday happenings that would be familiar to the listeners, although they did not report actual events. They illustrated specific truths concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus uses the image of a sower going out to sow seed and begins by telling the story purely in those terms, talking about where the seed falls, what happens to it, and what the results are, and then later in the chapter, He explains the parable in terms of the spiritual realities it conveys.

Jesus provides four examples of what can happen when the seed is sown, and three of those four examples are *negative*. That's why it can be discouraging to be involved in sowing the seed. We don't see the results we would like to see after the seed is sown. Note throughout here, by the way, that the problem is not with the seed. There's nothing wrong or deficient in the seed itself. The problem is in what happens once the seed has been sown.

So, Jesus gives four examples. Let's take them one at a time.

Jesus begins: **"A sower went out to sow. ⁴ While he was sowing, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them."** Then Jesus provides the interpretation: **"When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom but does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This one is he who has been sown along the path."**

The sowing of the seed does not happen in a vacuum. Some forces at work would hinder the Gospel seed from taking root and producing fruit. And noted first is the work of the Evil One, the Devil. The Devil's goal is to keep people from believing God's Word, thus keeping them in darkness and unbelief. That happens when people come in contact with God's Word, but it seems to bounce right off, to go in one ear and out the other. The hard ground has not been ploughed or broken up, so the seed sits on the surface, and the Devil comes along and snatches it away. People don't sense their need for a Saviour and feel sufficient in themselves. Their heart becomes so hardened that it may take some painful ploughing - a tragedy or a setback or failure, whereby they finally hit bottom - to get them to feel their need for the Gospel. That's the first example

of when our sowing the seed may seem useless: when the ground is so hardened that nothing gets through, and the Devil comes and takes the Word away.

Second, Jesus continues: **“Other seeds fell on the stony places, where they did not have much soil. Because their soil was not deep, the seeds came up quickly. ⁶ However, when the sun rose, they were scorched and, because they had no root, they withered.”** And then the explanation: **“The one who has been sown on the stony places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ but does not have root in himself. He lasts for only a short time and, when trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he immediately falls away.”**

Here are people who come into the church for a while but don't last. At first, they seem happy to be a Christian, which may last some weeks, months, or even years. But maybe they've been misled into believing that being a Christian should mean that *everything will be pleasant from here on out*. They think that they should be living their best life *now*. They're not ready to endure hardship or persecution. The Christian faith has not taken real deep root in them. They can't stand the heat, so they leave the kitchen. They leave the church. They fall away from the faith.

I'm sure we've all seen examples of this. People who come into the church and seem happy to be here - for a while. But when things don't go their way, whether, in their life or the church, they drift away and stop coming.

This is a firm warning for us all because it is not just about other people. This is a danger for us, as well. When life turns sour, are we going to give up on God? Are we going to bail out on the church? God forbid! God help us in our weakness! We need the sustaining power of the Gospel; the Word and Sacrament God uses to strengthen our feeble knees so that we do not fall away.

Our third example is: **“Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them.”** And then the explanation: **“The person who has been sown among thorns is one who hears the Word, but the worry of the world and the seduction that comes from riches choke the Word, and it does not produce anything.”**

What are the 'thorns' Jesus is speaking about? It is these, **“the worry of the world and the seduction that comes from riches.”** These things can choke out the Word of God in our life. We get so caught up in these things that our faith gets squeezed out. We get so busy or consumed with other things that we have no time for God's Word. People have time for every other thing but claim that

they have no time to go to church. But our priorities then are out of whack. Jesus says, “*A person does not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes out through the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4) and “*be eager to have the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will also be given to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

Again, this is a danger *even for us*. We can get so caught up with other things that we lose sight of the priority of hearing God’s Word. Like Martha, we can become so anxious and worried about many things that we neglect the one thing needful: to sit at Jesus’ feet and receive from Him.¹

The three examples Jesus has given in His parable have been negative. The seed is sown in each case, but no lasting results exist. The Devil snatches the seed away from the hardened ground, the heat of trouble or persecution causes the plant to wither and die, and the cares of this world and the desire for wealth choke out the priority of God’s Word. Each case leads to a bad result, which helps to explain why we see empty pews in church and a lack of zeal and fervour for the Gospel.

But lest we become discouraged, Jesus adds one more example to give us hope when we feel like giving up. When sowing the seed seems useless, we learn that things are not always what they seem. Jesus tells us why: “**However, other seeds fell on the good soil and produced grain, some a hundred, some sixty and some thirty times as much.**” The interpretation: “**the person who has been sown on the good soil is the one who hears the Word and understands it, and so produces and yields, sometimes a hundred, sometimes sixty and sometimes thirty times as much.**”

Here we have some positive results! All is not lost! Other seeds sown will not be snatched away, burned up, or choked out. There will be seed that takes root, grows, and produces a good crop. Jesus says so.

Why? It’s not because we are such good soil in ourselves. No, we must confess that apart from Christ, *we can do nothing*.² The power is in the Word itself; it is right there in the seed. Consider what we heard in the First Reading today. The LORD God promises: “*My Word... will not return to Me without results but will*

¹ Luke 10:38-42

² John 15:5

accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do" (Isaiah 55:11).

Dear friends, God's Word is powerful and creative and efficacious. It does produce results! This is the Gospel Word that tells us of our Saviour. It is the Word of Christ. "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). God's Word is alive and active, penetrating our hearts to produce repentance and faith. This is faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour, who rescues us from sin, death, and the Devil by His own death on our behalf and His glorious resurrection. What Christ has won for us on the cross is delivered to us in the mighty and life-giving Gospel. The Word works.

So, stop being afraid, little flock.³ All is not lost. Sowing the seed is not useless. Christ is building His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.⁴ God will keep us in the faith. God will bring others to faith in Christ and keep them in the faith and the church. And God does this through the ministry of the Gospel, the preaching and teaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments.

Therefore, we continue to sow the seed. Christ has sent us on this mission, and the results are up to Him. Sometimes it seems like nobody is listening or responding, and we feel like we're just spinning our wheels and not getting anywhere. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles also experienced this frustration. We're not alone in this. No, Christ our Lord is with us as we sow the seed. Along with His commission to baptise and teach, Jesus assures us: "*I am with you always, until the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus has not abandoned His church. He is with us, and He will help us keep on keeping on.

Dear friends, when it seems like sowing the seed is useless and will not produce results, and we feel like giving up and packing it in - at times like these, remember the Parable of the Sower. Jesus assures us that all our sowing is not in vain. The Word works. There is no greater activity going on in the world today than the sowing of the Gospel seed. We need it. The world needs it, and Jesus will bless it. "**Let the one who has ears listen!**" Amen.

³ Luke 12:32

⁴ Matthew 16:18

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and merciful God, we praise Your holy name. We praise You for Your witness to Yourself in your glorious creation, with all its wisdom and its wonders, and in all the blessings that come to us through them. We thank You, Father, for giving us a clearer and fuller message of Your truth in the Holy Scriptures. By the Spirit who inspired them, make us living stones in Your temple, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Above all, centre our lives in Your Son, whom You have sent as the living Word, to convey to all people Your full grace and truth.

We praise You that Your Son became a human being like us. We praise You that He has given us His life of perfect obedience to redeem our lives, and to set His example before us. We praise You that He has died to take on Himself our sins; and that He has risen to give us unending life. We praise You for making these blessings of Christ our own through Baptism and the gift of faith.

Grant that we may grow in them day by day, so that we may always be clothed with His righteousness and live the new life. By Your Spirit, help us to put to death the desires of our sinful natures, to put away all hatred and bitterness, to conquer all evil habits, and to live in fellowship with You.

Spirit of the living God, we praise You for bringing the Church into existence. By Your gracious power, renew it daily in faith and life. Move Your people to offer their whole selves to their Lord and to proclaim His saving love.

Give saving faith to the nations of the earth, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and live before You in obedience. Bless our country Australia with leaders whose consciences are guided by Your voice, and with citizens whose minds are fixed on doing Your will.

Bless all who are in some special need of Your help. Remember, in particular, those who are sick, or suffering physical or mental distress. Touch them with Your healing love, and show them what great things You have prepared for them.

O God, Creator, Saviour, and Advocate, help us during our days on earth to let Your light transform every area of our lives, and, when death comes, keep us for Your eternal kingdom. These things we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and rules, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Article: An Emphasis on Works

Since Luther's day, people have accused Lutherans of de-emphasising good works. Who will do good works if we do not have to do good works to go to heaven? Why should anyone do good works? Since Luther's day, Lutherans have answered that we are simply putting good works into the right place - as the result, not the cause of salvation. Salvation by Christ alone, apart from our works, is the only motivation for true good works.

The accusation is not an attack on Lutheranism. It is an attack on the Bible and Christianity. For Lutheranism is simply Biblical Christianity. The accusation is an attack on Jesus Christ, for it denies that He is the Saviour. It makes us our own saviours and our own gods, trusting ourselves to climb up to heaven by our own efforts. It is idolatry.

The Gospel is that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, has kept the Law of God perfectly for us and then suffered and died on the cross for our sins in our place. He did the job perfectly, as He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). We are saved by God's grace alone - only because Jesus has appeased God's anger against our sin (grace is the opposite of anger). We are saved through the Gospel (also expressed in Baptism and Communion). The Gospel brings us the blessings Christ has earned for us. It creates and preserves the faith (trust) that alone receives forgiveness, life, and salvation for Christ's sake.

Salvation is entirely apart from our works. The Bible says that in many ways throughout. Paul says it in so many words (Romans 3:19-4:8; Ephesians 2:8-9). Anyone who teaches that good works are necessary for salvation is opposed to the Bible and the Gospel, to Christ and God, to the prophets and apostles, and to the true Church at all times. For all Christians trust Christ alone for salvation, not themselves or their works (Galatians 5:4).

Who will do good works? Those who believe that they have been saved without works will do good works. They alone will do true good works, for they alone have the true motivation for good works. Full and free salvation by Christ alone is that unique motivation. Christ died for us so that we would live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15).

If we did good works to earn our way to heaven, they would not be good works. They may be outwardly good, but they would be inwardly selfish. We would be

loving and helping ourselves, not other people. We would be using others to get something for ourselves.

1 John 4:19 says it all: “We love Him, because He first loved us.” The context explains that love starts with God loving us. Our love is motivated by God’s love for us in Christ. It is God’s work that we begin to love Him and our neighbour, grow in that love, and do good works that proceed from love. God should be praised and glorified for our good works (Matthew 5:16). But He will still be pleased to commend us for them (Matthew 25:31-40; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

The Bible says that God loves us first and we love Him in return. The works-for-salvation teaching says that we have to love God first and He will love us in return. But God’s love is never “in return,” always “in the first place.” Our love is in return for His love in Christ - by His power, not our own; to His glory, not our own; for our neighbour’s benefit, not our own.

That is clear in the Bible, but the fallen mind reverses it. To keep it straight, remember that good works do not result in salvation. Salvation results in good works! When we recite Ephesians 2:8-9, we should include verse 10. We are saved by grace through faith, not by or through works. But we are God’s workmanship, made anew in Christ, to do good works.

Preaching that we must save ourselves by good works cannot produce a single selfless work of love. At most, it can promote outward works from inward selfishness. Preaching that we are saved by Christ alone produces real good works. God’s love in Christ is not only the example but also the motivation. The Gospel is God’s power to bring us not only to faith but also to love.

It moves us to love God, to be grateful to God, and to want to serve God. That means wanting to serve others, whom God also loves, for whom Christ also died - that is, all our neighbours.

It is pretty hard to hate another person if we remember that God loves him just as God loves us and that Christ has died for him just as Christ has died for us. That is how the Gospel moves us to love and serve not only God but also man. That is how true good works are produced.

A proper emphasis on good works still means putting the main and major emphasis on Christ and His love and works for us.

Children's Message:

Picture in your mind a container with soil in it, as well as some wheat seeds. Who knows what you need to do to grow some of these seeds into plants? Yes, you put the seeds into the soil.



Now you know, if you put this container where it will get some sun and you water it, you'll see a plant grow. If you have good seeds and good soil, the seed will put out roots into that soil and make stems and leaves, and eventually, new wheat seeds will grow on the plant.

Jesus told a story like this in today's Gospel. He said that when we hear the Bible or teaching on the Bible, God is planting His special seeds inside us. God's message about Jesus is like the seed that goes into this soil, roots, and grows up into a healthy plant. That's what happens when we hear God telling us that Jesus died and rose to be our Saviour. God's Holy Spirit works in us and helps us believe and understand the Bible, and that seed grows into a plant. God's Word in the Bible grows in us. It is good seed, and He wants to plant it in you and me.

But Jesus says something really important at the end of his story: "*Let the one who has ears listen!*" (Matthew 13:9). What does Jesus mean?

Maybe Mum or Dad has said to you at one time, "You need to listen!" Jesus is telling us to listen to God speaking in the Bible. When you hear the Bible at church when the pastor preaches or at Sunday School or in devotions at home, Jesus says, "Listen. I'm talking to you." That's how His seed gets into the soil - when we listen to God.

Help me to listen to Your Word, Lord, that I may hear the wonderful news of my salvation!



WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

23 July 8 Pentecost	30 July Mission Day	6 August 10 Pentecost
8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR	10.00am TMBA HC AELC Mission Day Service	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC
Sunday, 23 July		
READINGS: Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:18-27; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43		
HYMNS: 303 485 497 (73 327) 509		
Sunday, 30 July		
READINGS: Isaiah 62:1-7; Romans 10:11-17; Luke 24:44-53		
HYMNS: 221 215 45 65 (287 [293 if needed]) 845 (tune 391)		

JULY BIBLE STUDIES:

Thursday, 20 July, 7.30pm, Greenwood.

Friday, 28 July, 7.30pm, Oak/Aub at Aubigny.

Sunday, 30 July, 8.30am, Toowoomba.