



Office of the President
3015 Ave K NW
Winter Haven FL 33881
863.299.4084

PRESIDENT'S LETTER -SEPTEMBER 05

“A sower went out to sow his seed” (Luke 8:5).

“The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). In this parable, Jesus describes what happens when the word of God is proclaimed. The emphasis is not on the sower of the seed as if the sower makes the seed produce plants and the harvest. The power of life is in the seed itself. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace - the Gospel and the Sacraments.

As children of God, we find it difficult to believe that anyone would not believe the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is so clear and so wonderful to those who believe. This parable stresses that the seed does not always find good ground, and that the natural imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth (Genesis 6).

There is always the prideful inclination for us as pastor-sowers to think that we can do something to help the Gospel along and make it palatable to our hearers. We think that the clarity of our sermons or our powerful presentation or our irresistible logic guarantees success to our preaching and ministry. This is made worse by our age's fascination with numerical growth. There is a tendency to adopt methods that create outward, superficial numbers. In the South I was struck by evangelists who tended to keep track of the number of converts like scalps on a belt. There is the tendency to measure our mission efforts in the CLC by an emphasis on statistical numbers.

The reality of the reaction to the Gospel was captured by Pastor Mayhew. When he pointed out the failings of idolatrous Hindu religion in India, a large number of adults promptly walked out. The Christian religion in South America and Africa has struggled with the temptation to incorporate items from pagan animism and give them a Christian terminology. The largest growing evangelical church in Nairobi, Kenya, preaches a message of “healing, prosperity, and salvation.” We tend to evaluate our ministry by the world's standards.

Jesus describes for us the reality of what happens when the word of God is preached.

Some of the seed falls on the hard pathway that borders the fields. The seed cannot even penetrate the hard ground, and the birds eat it before it even has a chance to take root. (Luke 8:12) "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." When we preach the word, we need to realize that for many people there will be no effect or result. There is a hard-hearted resistance to even giving the word of God a hearing in the world today. Most people that we come into contact with will not even give our message a chance. Some of the seed we sow will not even penetrate the consciousness of society in general.

Some of the seed falls on the rocks and because of the warmth, quickly springs up; but it withers and dies just as quickly because there is no moisture. (Luke 8:13) "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away." All of us have had the experience of people responding with joy to the message we preach. In fact, they are almost over enthusiastic in their new-found faith. But just as quickly, they are gone. Jesus describes people

who receive the word with joy but don't put down roots. They believe for a while but because they have no solid roots, they fall away in time of temptation. Much of our ministry consists of the slow process of building a root system in our people by grounding them firmly in the word of God. Much of the religious enthusiasm of today dies as quickly as it sprang up.

Some of the seed falls among the thorns and over time the thorns and thistles crowd out the growing plants. Have you ever wondered why if you give your plants a good start and then just let the weeds go, the weeds always win? (Luke 8:14) "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity." Again, we are talking about people who hear the word and participate in the sacraments. These are that group of members who gradually begin to miss church and Bible Class. These are the young people who go away to college and put their study of the word on hold. These are we pastors who become distracted with many things. Faith is choked with the cares (anxieties), riches, and pleasures of life. Take your pick. Each one of these will kill faith over time. We often do not warn people about this three-pronged danger to faith. These dangers gradually choke out faith and are dangerous because everything seems to be all right.

We should not become disheartened when we experience in our ministry the very things pictured by Jesus in this parable. Our calling is to sow the seed which is the word of God. The word will not return to the Lord empty. It will accomplish God's purposes.

Pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His field. Pray for our professors at ILC who have been entrusted with the task of preparing young people for the public ministry. Pray for our teachers who have been given responsibility for the tender young. Pray for one another as we are co-laborers in the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.

John Schierenbeck

NOTES:

The Co-ordinating Council will meet September 28-29. Boards will meet September 26-27. The Board of Trustees will have an update on the financial situation and a report published at the beginning of September.