

THE POWER OF GOD IS HIS WORD

It will not return to Him empty -- It will accomplish His purpose.

Isaiah 55:10,11

TEXT: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

The power of God! Is it seen in those terrifying tornados that skip about the mid-section of our land? Is it in the mighty earthquakes that shook Nepal the other day killing more than 7000 people and affecting more than 25% of its population? Even mighty Mt. Everest was shaken, killing some 19-20 climbers, including two Americans. The power of God! Is it seen in the fiery eruption of volcanos like Mt. Calbuco in Chile that forced the evacuation of more than 1500 people from their homes in the nearby village of Ensenada? Some wonder why God would use his power to kill and destroy.

But Scripture also records God's power being used to save even as he destroys. We cite examples of the universal flood that destroyed all life on the earth only to save his Church in the ark that Noah was commanded to build. Or we recall how God used his power to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah while saving Lot from losing his faith. And again, we recall how the Lord saved Israel by parting the Red Sea and then causing the waters to roll back again, drowning Pharaoh and his mighty chariots.

The first display of God's power was in his work of creation. Scripture says: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* Ps 16 But then, within hours, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin and God's creation had been ruined. Then the Lord immediately revealed his greatest power: the power of his glorious grace through the promise of a baby to be born who would destroy Satan's power, the curse of sin, and even death itself. Easter is our celebration of that baby's power. Baby Jesus grew up to be Jesus the Christ of God who died on the cross as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world and then rose again for the justification of all mankind.

That is the power of God that is at work among us who are gathered together today to worship his power to save. **THE POWER OF GOD IS HIS WORD.** His word will not return to him empty!

Where God's Word is proclaimed, the Lord will accomplish his purpose and souls will be saved.

Note carefully that I do not say that the power of God is IN His Word, as if it is up to us to page through the Bible to find what is God's Word and what is not. But the power of God IS His Word! It is what is printed on the pages of this book that is Holy because it is set apart from all other books ever written.

Now we know that God's Word is divided into two great doctrines: Law and Gospel. And God promises eternal life in both. To live eternally by the power of the Law a person must be what God created humans to be in the first place: in his image, that is to have a heart and a life in perfect agreement with the will of God. Even then, as Jesus himself once declared: *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'* Lu 17 Even if I were able to keep the law of God perfectly and never sin once, I would still have no claim on God because that's what God first made humans to be from the beginning! You could not say to your master, "Master, since I've been a good servant I deserve to own some of your property!" God says, "Who are you to tell me what you deserve?" So the Holy Law of God reveals the innermost arrogance and conceit that is in our hearts.

Not only that, but the Bible says: *The soul who sins is the one who will die.* Ez 18 What does that say about us? Since all die it follows that all have sinned. What does that say about babies and children? It says that they are sinners. Even unborn infants die, testifying that they too are sinful.

Because we are sinful, God's Law only empowers more hatred against God who demands perfection if we should hope to live.

But the Gospel has a different power. The Bible says: *... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Ro 6 How can this be? Paul explains: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* 2Co 5 Jesus says: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Jn11 This Word of God, the Gospel, gives hope to all who believe that God will keep these promises. As Paul also writes: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* Ro 1

Many wring their hands today over the moral condition of our land. Children are having sex and shooting each other; drugs and alcohol are out of control; materialism and greed replace Sunday worship; trash on TV and in the movies are changing the way people behave. Many wonder what we can do. Take away guns? Evil hearts will use knives to murder. Send our children to private schools? Their sinful hearts will go to school with them. But if you want your children to join you in living lives that glorify God, then lead them to where the power of God is at work! Lead them to the rain and snow of His life-giving Gospel! There God works His power in you and in the hearts of those we love! Remember, He says His investment will not return to Him empty!

God promises that His Word will not return to Him empty! The fruit it produces are hearts that accomplish *...the purpose for which (He) sent it.*

The Gospel, then, moves sinners to love God's Son and to serve the God who has so graciously saved us. Our Lord says: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth...* Rain and snow that waters the earth, and the seed that buds and grows -- all this is not the power of man, but of God.

Jesus once told the parable about the farmer that scatters the seed from which crops would grow. The "seed" in Jesus' parable stands for the Gospel of forgiveness of sins. As he scattered the seed, some fell on a pathway and was trampled, some fell among weeds and the little plants were choked off by the weeds; some fell on gravel so that when the little plants started to grow they couldn't survive. Jesus tells us that there will be hearts that might even believe for a time, but then lose faith and love for God. Their faith that is choked off by the cares and worries of this life -- by materialism and worldliness -- by the Devil and sin.

According to Jesus, either a person is good ground, which receives the seed of His Word and produces fruit to the glory of the Lord, or he is not. Either he will persevere in faith to the end, or he is one of the types of ground that is rocky and hard so that the Word that it hears is finally despised. Jesus' parable would cause us to ask: What kind of soil am I? Again, it is God who gives me the answer in His Word. And only those who listen to and believe His Word will know the answer.

Today, at this location, the Lord has gathered a congregation of souls who worship Him and sing praises to His Holy name. His Word has NOT returned to Him empty but has and is producing fruit! It is accomplishing and achieving *the purpose for which (He) sent it.* You are a people who have confessed your sins before your merciful Lord, and have promised to amend your ways.

But while God accomplishes His purpose among us, Jesus warns there may be some whose hearts are hard; some whose faith is failing; some who are hypocrites and good pretenders. Each of us will ask: What must I do? Listen to the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins and believe that the promise of God does what He says! That is why the Gospel is so vital in our lives. Do you want to have good

children whose hearts are turned in love to God? Bring them to Jesus in Holy Baptism, and then keep them with Jesus by bringing them to where the power of God is found! Bring them to church with you! For where the Gospel is preached, there God's Holy Spirit does His work. There He graciously creates the faith that holds to Jesus and feeds that created faith in order that the threats of death and the fears of dying will not overwhelm us and cause us to despair.

This, too, is what I must do: whenever Jesus comes to this congregation with the "snow and rain" of the Lord's Supper to give us His true body and blood, let us receive the Sacrament with joy and listen to His Words and believe them! Then I see and taste His calling and promise, for His Body and Blood have come to me! Since this is God's Word and power and not mine, I can know for certain that **"The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, will keep you in the one true faith until life everlasting!"**

Finally, this is what we must do: proclaim the Word of God, both Law and the blessed Gospel to the world and to ourselves and to our children. Then others will be called by the Power of God as we scatter the seed. And since it is the power of God there will be results! For He Himself says that His Word will not return to Him empty! This is not magic, but the Power and Promise of God! Amen.