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Pentecost 7 – Isaiah 55:10-11 – God’s Word Does Not Fail

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What would we do without photosynthesis, am I right? Photosynthesis is what makes the big bucks for all the farmers out there, and it’s the reason that we have so many beautiful flowers and plants in our backyards and gardens. In fact, without photosynthesis, the world’s economy and even its existence would have to be very, very different because of how central that one little scientific process is to the way we live here on Earth. Now if you don’t remember that term from science classes back in the day, I won’t spend a bunch of time trying to describe it to you, because I’m not even really sure I know how it works. All I know is that it has to do with plants taking in light and air and water and turning them into energy for them to grow and oxygen for us to breathe. And you know really, it doesn’t matter if you know exactly *how* it works, as long as you just know *that* it works.

And I think that’s a helpful comparison for us to make when we consider the way God works with his Word in this world. He has his own purposes, his own desires, his own intentions, and we might not know what they are all the time. But we trust that he always accomplishes what he intends for our good, and that’s really all that matters. In our first lesson for today, God tells us that his Word is like photosynthesis. It just works, whether you know exactly how or not. God’s Word does not fail because it comes from our holy, almighty God, who never fails, and it does not fail because no matter what it says or who it says it to, it always speaks truth and it always has power to work faith.

But I ask: what about when people just don’t care? What about when people toss God’s Word aside like it’s worthless trash that means nothing to them? Where’s its power then? Well, that was a problem that Isaiah had when he prophesied to the people of Israel. God’s prophets told the Israelites again and again that judgment and destruction was coming because of the unfaithfulness of the people who turned away from the LORD. The message of God’s Word was clear and urgent and persistent, but so many people didn’t even bother to listen because to them the LORD and whatever part he claimed to play in their lives was nothing but an afterthought at best.

But see, God’s Word always speaks truth, whether people believe it or not. First of all, it is the objective standard of what is right and what is wrong for our lives and our relationship with him. God laid that all out for his people at Mt. Sinai when he brought them out of Egypt. He gave them the Ten Commandments and he told them that they would be blessed if they kept them with peaceful and enjoyable lives here in this world, but they would have nothing but trouble if they disobeyed his laws – and the greatest trouble they would have is that their

broken relationship would mean only punishment and condemnation when they stood guilty before God’s judgment seat one day.

For those people who rejected God and didn’t believe his Word, that still didn’t change the fact that God’s Word is powerful and effective truth. Unfortunately for them, it just changes the effect that it has. At that point, rather than creating faith and guiding and blessing their lives as God really intends it to, the Word became a testimony against them that they rejected God’s goodness, they rejected what was right for their lives, and so they would have to face the consequences one day. They couldn’t say that God didn’t tell them so. Now the Word always called those people back to repentance and the blessings of God’s full and free salvation for everyone who listens, but it also warned them of the judgment they faced if nothing changed and they continued to reject God in their unbelief.

And that’s still just as true today as it was back then. Even though there are so many people nowadays that deny God’s Word and its authority for their lives, it’s still the standard that holds us accountable for our actions before God – whether people want to admit it or not. It still tells us what’s right and what’s wrong, the Ten Commandments still stand even for us, and it doesn’t matter if society (or even other churches!) say otherwise. Society does not have the authority to supplant the true God and his enduring Word. Society may smile on open sexual expression and abortion and religious pluralism and doing whatever makes you feel good, but that doesn’t necessarily make it right. Society tells us that science and acceptance of all different lifestyles and viewpoints is a lot better for us nowadays than whatever the Bible has to say, but that doesn’t make it so. The world around us tells us that Christianity’s time has passed and it’s best to leave this idea of *God* out of the picture because all he does is cause problems between us and distract us from reality, but that’s not actually going to help anything in the long run. The people of this world need Christianity, they need God, and they need his Word now more than ever, because without them, just like those unbelieving Israelites, the only thing that awaits them is death and punishment in hell because they rejected the one who came to save them. That’s not what any of us wants, least of all our loving God.

But for the *believers* that were left in Israel, when they heard Isaiah’s prophecy, well they weren’t too keen on everything he said was going to happen to them. They were going to lose the Promised Land? They were going to lose the temple? God’s own chosen people would be taken away from their home and everything that God had given them, and they’d be carried off to exile in Babylon? That was unthinkable, to say nothing of the terror an invading army posed for each person’s life and family and home.

But it was for those people specifically that God made this promise in his Word today: “*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.*”

This was a pretty crushing blow that God’s people faced, so I’m sure you can understand that they might have had some serious questions. God, didn’t you say this? Didn’t you promise that? Then how can you possibly allow this to happen to us? How can you let your own chosen people go through this? Won’t you do something? *Can’t* you do something?

Well, they really needed to hear this, and we do too. God’s Word works. It’s powerful, it’s effective. When God speaks, he fulfills. He doesn’t lie and his Word does not fail. When God makes promises, he binds himself to them so that we can cling to them exactly for times like these. We can trust God absolutely that he will make good on his Word – it’s just that his purposes and our expectations aren’t always the same, so we have to make sure we’re keeping our eyes open for the way he is actually working in our lives and letting him work in whatever ways are pleasing to him and truly beneficial to us.

And that’s important for us to understand, because we have a tendency to lose sight of what really matters. Whether people believe it or not, this life and the things of this world aren’t God’s highest priority for us, even though he does certainly care for our physical needs and wants. No, the most important thing for us in God’s eyes is our spiritual life, our eternal life, and our relationship with him, and so he always ultimately works in ways that benefit those. So God told the Israelites that they would be taken into captivity in Babylon, yes; but he also promised them that that captivity would discipline them to stay faithful to him – it would be for their good in the long run and in eternity! – and one day he would bring them back to the Promised Land and fulfill all the rest of his promises of salvation through them, just as he had said.

And so also for us, when our lives are spinning out of control and everything seems to be going wrong – you lose your job or you have a death or sickness in your family or the crosses you bear for being a Christian just seem like too much, or whatever it is in your own life, and you all know – God can make us a simple promise like, “*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me*” (Psalm 50:15), and that means the world for us. Does God often fix our problems? Yes. Does he often take away our troubles? Yes. Does he often heal what’s wrong with us or our loved ones? Yes, we all know it because we’ve seen it happen all the time throughout our lives.

So then, does that mean God is being unfaithful and his Word is just an empty promise if he doesn’t? No, because remember: *God always works for the sake of what’s most important in our lives and for our spiritual, eternal good.* God uses the troubles in our lives to bring us closer to him, to our loved ones, and to our brothers and sisters in faith, and even if our troubles result in death, that may just be the greatest deliverance of all because it means leaving this world of sin and sorrow and going to be with God in heaven forever, where we will never have any trouble ever again.

And really that’s the most important thing about God’s Word: it gives us the certain hope for heaven through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. See, just like a plant that gets light and water and fresh air will grow and flourish – that’s just how it works – God promises that the faith of a Christian who stays closely connected to his Word and Sacraments is also going to grow and flourish. It’s just natural, and it’s something we can absolutely trust and depend on.

But just like it takes time for plants and crops to grow even when they’re getting everything they need, that’s the way it is for us in our spiritual lives, too – real growth and progress takes time and takes commitment to the Word so the Holy Spirit can have ample opportunity to work and to keep saving faith in Jesus Christ in your hearts. And God promises that as time goes on and you stay connected to his Word, your faith is going to grow stronger and deeper and it’s going to bolster your desire and motivation to love and serve God and your neighbor throughout your life. That’s why it’s so important to be here in church and Bible study regularly and to have personal devotions and Bible reading time at home, because every time you take in God’s Word, it’s like you’re having a meal that strengthens your relationship with Jesus Christ and spurs on your life of Christian good works. God’s Word does not fail because it is the power of salvation for everyone who believes, it gives us joy and peace in sins forgiven through faith in our Savior Jesus, and it’s the light that calls us out of this dark world and guides our lives home to heaven.

No, God’s purposes and desires might not always be ours, and what he accomplishes with his Word might not always be apparent to the naked eye. That’s okay. That’s part of God being God and us being us. We don’t have to understand all the time. All he wants us to do is trust him, and he promises that in the end you’ll never be disappointed. You trust that photosynthesis makes your crops and plants grow? Well, trust even more that God’s Word works with power and effect for the good of his people in every situation, because there’s nothing that he loves and cares about more in all of creation than you. Even when everyone else seems to be turning their backs on it and even when your world seems to be turning upside down, cling for dear life to the Word of your Savior-God, keep your eyes on the heavenly home that he’s preparing for you right now, and know for certain that his Word and promises for your life will never fail. Amen.