**Fear Birds, Rocks, and Thorns**

**Luke 8:4-15**

Septuagesima

2.7.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is it that scares you? The dark? High places? Snakes? Spiders? Covid-19? The vaccine for it? If you fear lions, tigers, and bears, then you need to add a hearty, “oh my” at the end of that phrase.

How many of you fear, “birds, rocks, thorns?” I am not a big fan of thorns, but I do not fear them. I do wear heavyweight clothing to go pick blackberries because of the thorns – but fear them? No!

According to our text we should be a little concerned about birds, rocks, and thorns. Jesus uses the example of birds, rocks, and thorns in today’s parable to explain that which can rob us of faith and leave us in a seriously ugly condition for eternity. These enemies can leave people never bearing fruit the fruit of faith, never becoming what they were intended to be. Ultimately, birds, rocks, and thorns can keep someone from not becoming what they were intended to be for eternity.

Dearly beloved of God, that is not a good thing.

Our text contains a parable, so we need to understand some things – it is not literal. First, the sower is our Heavenly Father. Secondly, the seed is Christ, the very Word of God which became flesh for us.

And of course, we need to be concerned about things like birds, rocks, and thorns. These are the things that can rob us of our faith in Christ.

First there is the seed on the path. Birds come and eat the seed. Jesus explains this as Satan, who comes and takes the Word from the hearts of those who have heard it. Satan, the father of lies removes faith. Satan tempts with falsehood and deception. How? In many ways. If he can get us to believe in evolution, then we will doubt the creation account – and it is not far to get us to doubt the truth of all of Scripture. If he can get us to think that some things are not sinful, then we may see no need for the cross. If he can get us to believe that there are many ways to get into heaven, and that Jesus is not the only way, we may pick one we think is easier to follow, and take it – all the way to hell.

These are only some of the ways that Satan steals the Word from those who hear it. Dear friends, as numerous as the birds of the air – so are the cunning lies of the devil.

You know what, birds are dangerous. Satan can rob the faith from our hearts, we never become what we could be.

Next, rocky ground is dangerous too. Seed that fell on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

How many have had a beginning in the faith, but then trials come along and they fall from faith. Many think that since they are believers in God, they should therefore be immune from all trials and troubles in life. Many are the preachers who proclaim such lies, that if you love God, then God will make sure you don’t have problems and God will give you all you desire. I recently heard someone declare that if you are truly a believer you will not get COVID.

Even beyond the fact that this is a bold-faced lie, such thinking also leaves people vulnerable. In a world corrupted by sin, with death as the wages awaiting us all, be sure of this fact – trials and tribulations will come into every life. Jesus Himself instructed us to take up our cross and follow Him. If we do not understand this, and trials come along, faith in God can quickly crumble. This is especially true if we believe that all should be glorious in the life of a believer. Many with this sort of thinking fall from faith when trials and tribulations come along.

Of course, we should also watch out for thorns. Thorns are a sticky situation. Jesus explains thorns as the cares and riches and pleasures of this life that keep fruit from maturing.

How about it, does that sound true? What is it that keeps people who were baptized and confirmed, and live in the area, away from gathering with us every week to have faith strengthened and nourished? What keeps people away from Bible Study where they could have faith strengthened and nourished? So very often it is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life that get in the way of the fruit of the faith coming to full maturity.

Getting home from work, the couch, the TV remote, and the bottle opener get a nice work-out, but the Bible and devotional book do not. If the pastor is coming over, those books will get dusted off and prominently placed on the coffee table. But when the pastor picks them up, it is evident they have not been opened often, for the binding creaks. You know that the world would end if bowling night or pool league might have to be cancelled because of a snow storm one week.

But to gather with brothers and sisters in Christ to have faith fed and nourished in Word and Sacrament – well, if there is the threat of snow it is reason enough to not set the alarm for Sunday morning. And if it is not snow, gathering in God’s house only gets on the schedule after all the ***important stuff*** gets done first. And Bible Study, well that never gets into the schedule. Come on, a whole hour reading and studying the Bible? There are better things to do. Besides, I learned it all in Confirmation class – I cannot remember it, but at least I learned it.

What is really funny, is how many people cannot get to services on either Sunday morning or Wednesday evening, cannot be bothered with Bible Study, have not opened their Bibles since Confirmation – but when it comes to religious discussions, they know more than the pastor. And if the pastor disagrees with them, well, he’s just out of touch, an amazing idiot who just needs to get with the program.

Yes, thorns choke out some plants so that no fruit matures on them. Faith gets squelched by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. Some people, maybe even a few sitting in the pews this morning, will even complain that it is not fair to make such an assessment about their faith.

But if you ask them why this Sunday was the only Sunday they made it to church in the last month, they have a thousand and one excuses. And their excuses only help prove the point that too much is going on in their lives, and God’s taking a back seat – to the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life.

Before you try to figure out which soil you are, know this simple fact. You may be any one of these soils at any given time. You may even be multiple types of soil at one time. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh are continually tempting us to unbelief, fear, great shame and vice.

You may be a little discouraged right about now. “Birds, rocks, thorns? Is my faith in trouble? I am probably lost, woe is me.”

Stop right there dear friends, consider this. What is the purpose of seed? To grow up and produce fruit. What is the seed in our text, it is the Word of God – Christ is the very Word of God. As Isaiah recorded for us, the Word goes forth from the mouth of the Lord and does not return to Him empty, but accomplishes the purpose for which He sent it.

The Word comes into the world to bear fruit.

He ***will*** bear fruit.

He came into the world regardless of what would happen to Him.

Satan tempted Him, but He accomplished His task without sin – He defeated the birds.

Testing and trials came upon Him, but He held firm to His course to redeem us from our sin – He trod the path.

The cares, riches, and pleasures of this life enticed Him, but He went forward to the cross – He survived the choking weeds.

The Word knew that He would be persecuted for His innocence, that He would suffer at the hands of evil men, and that He would die – but He endured it all anyway. Three days later He was raised again – bringing with Him life eternal to those who believe.

Seed is sown today to bear fruit. God sows the seed of His Word – Christ comes to accomplish His task. He comes to build and strengthen faith. He does not care the condition of the soil, He is the seed sown, and this seed bears fruit. The Word will accomplish the task for which it is sent.

In baptism the seed is sown. In the miracle of baptism is the powerful Word of Christ – Christ Himself is present. Hidden from our eyes, Christ comes to unite the baptized to Himself. Christ unites the baptized to His death for the forgiveness of sins. Christ unites the baptized to His resurrection that they might have a new life, and hope on the last day.

You are here today and the Word of God, Christ, is sown. He goes forth into you to accomplish His task. He is growing faith in you even now, as you hear this Word. Christ chases away Satan – Satan has no power over you. The Word cleanses you of your concerns over the trials that come upon you. Christ forgives you for your sinful pre-occupation with the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this life, and fills you with Himself. You are strengthened in faith and life to bear the fruit of faith, for it is the Word which bears fruit in you with patience.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.