

A Sunday Devotional for People and Families at Home

The First Church of Evans

Week Eleven - Sunday, May 31, 2020

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

I write to you this morning on Memorial Day. The flags are out and the gardeners are in the cemetery, each one planting and weeding and remembering a loved one. There are so many reasons to be happy and some number of reasons to be sad. But Spring is underway and every blooming flower speaks of God's ability to take what is drab and sad and to fill it with life and color and beauty.

The Lord Jesus knows the whole panorama. He taught us to see ourselves as the birds of the air, and the lilies of the fields, singing songs in flight, filling the hillsides with grandeur and color. Today, as we worship the Father, Carl Mende invites us to think on another wonder of Spring, seeds in the ground and the living Word of God, planted in our hearts and waiting to blossom and bear fruit in God's good time. Let's open our hearts today to what God wants to plant there.

Call to Worship

Isaiah 55:10,11

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth,
And making it bear and sprout,
and furnishing seed to the sower and food to the eater;
So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire,
and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."*

An Opening Prayer

Holy God and Merciful Father,

You sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Please forgive us our sins and grant us grace to take your Word to heart and to turn from our sins that we may greet with joy the return of Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Devotional

Mark 4:2-9

Carl Mende, Elder and Properties Chair

*And Jesus was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them,
"Listen! behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path,
and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil,
and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose it was scorched,
and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns,
and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.
And other seed fell into good soil and produced grain, growing and increasing
and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."
And he said, "he who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

One of the powerful truths that you learn by reading and studying the word of God is that the natural world around us often furnishes us with illustrations of spiritual truth. In our Call to Worship from Isaiah 55:10, we see that the continuous cycle of nature has a purpose. Rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to heaven until they have served their purpose here on earth. They cause the earth to bring forth "*seed to the sower and food to the eater*", so also in verse 11 we see that God's word when He sends it out does not return to him empty. It always fulfills his purpose on earth, accomplishing what He desires. As the falling of the rain and snow causes the earth to "*bear and sprout*" that is to bring forth fruit, so also God's word brings forth fruit in our lives.

In Mark 4:20, as Jesus is explaining the Parable of the Sower, we read: "*But those that were sown on the good soil are ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*" Jesus, in speaking of seed that fell on good ground, said that it represents those that "*hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.*"

Here in Mark's gospel as well as in Isaiah 55, these passages teach us about the effective nature of God's word and the grace that works through it. God's word has something to accomplish. His word does not lack power but is rich and full of life, it always succeeds in fulfilling His purpose. As we spend time in the word, as we grow in knowledge and understanding, it will strengthen us and bear fruit in our lives. We can then offer that fruit back in service to God and, in so doing, His word will "not return" to Him "empty."

Offering

Proverbs 3:9,10

*Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce,
then will your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats overflowing with new wine.*

Thank you for the faithfulness you have shown Christ and his kingdom during this season. Please mail what your heart leads you to give to: The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

(What follows is the script for the worship video we will offer this week via a link on our website: TheFirstChurchofEvans.com. If you cannot access the video, you can still join us by reading and praying and singing through the printed Order of Worship that follows.)

Greeting and Prayer

Hymn

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

See Insert

Table Talk

Isaiah 55:6,7

Carl Mende, Elder and Properties Chair

An Invitation to Be Forgiveness

Seek the LORD while He may be found;

Call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way,

And the unrighteous man his thoughts;

And let him return to the LORD,

And He will have compassion on him,

And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Just as the Apostle Paul’s theology was profoundly molded by his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, so the prophet Isaiah was deeply influenced by his temple vision that is recorded in Chapter 6 of the book of Isaiah. We won’t take time to review that vision today, but suffice it to say that Isaiah learned some things about God in that vision. He learned about God’s holiness, His incomparable majesty and character. Because of his understanding of God’s holiness, Isaiah also came to understand God’s intolerance for sin, which brings us to the passage in Isaiah 55:6,7.

Verse 6 implies both a promise and a warning. There is a sense of urgency to this call. He is saying, “**now is the time, God can be found now.**” The sense of the verse is that God can be found when our hearts are inclined to look for Him, and that even that inclination is a gift from God. Not seeking and failing to “*Call upon Him when He is near*” means that we will not receive the blessings that He has promised.

In verse 7, Isaiah impresses upon us the need for repentance among God’s people. He writes, “*Let the wicked forsake his way.*” We can never walk in God’s ways until we forsake our ways. Isaiah makes an interesting point when he writes that “*the unrighteous man*” needs to turn from “*his thoughts.*”

The battleground for a righteous walk with the Lord is often found in our minds and thoughts. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the Apostle Paul wrote about “*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*” It is not just our outward actions but our inward thoughts that must be brought into obedience to Christ.

If we do this, then we are left with an awesome, glorious promise. Isaiah tells us that when we turn to the Lord, “*he will abundantly pardon.*” The problem is never that God will reject us if we turn to Him, but rather the problem is that we fail to “*return to the LORD.*” What an awesome God we worship. He is offering us forgiveness and all we have to do is claim it.

Prayer **Philippians 4:6,7**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face this danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember the Janes, Pfalzgraf, Maybee, Willer, and Norton families as they mourn loved ones, also Richard Pearson in the hospital and Eric DePan as he continues to recover from eye surgery.

Hymn

“Spirit Song”

See Insert

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26 *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace.”*

With love from The First Church of Evans, till our eyes meet and our hands touch again.