

Sexagesima, 2/8/26

By the Rev'd John Crews

Epistle 2 Cor. xi. 19., *Gospel* St. Luke viii. 4.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Back in the 5th grade, we were given a clipping of some 'Creeping Charlie' or ground ivy. We were handed a styrofoam cup (so you know how long ago this was) and made to scoop out some potting soil, fill the cup and plant the Creeping Charlie. Each of our plants sat on the classroom window sill and watered our plants each day, and while we waited for them to grow, our teacher droned on about Mendel's experiments with plant genetics. After a couple of weeks, we measured our plants. Every plant had been watered the same and had pretty much the same sunlight. Despite this, some were flourishing, some were struggling. And the teacher, being absolutely horrendous and horrible, proceeded to grade based on how much our plants grew. Did I mention she was terrible?

Anyway, mine was somewhere in the lower quarter, barely poking out but with a new leaf sprouted but when I took it home, it started to flourish. I mean, it was Creeping Charlie, not even a plague of locusts armed with flamethrowers could kill it. Every time it outgrew a planter or a pot, my mom would dutifully take some of it and start another one. It was the only thing my mom could ever manage to grow, a source of great sorrow for a housewife who had lived through the 1970's fern craze.

It is always an interesting conundrum, why God's word takes root in some people and not others, why it occurs at a particular time and not others. Scripture affirms what each of us know deep in our hearts, that we are made for a relationship with God; and that yearning and desire are at the deepest level the foundation of our very being, a longing that motivates and flavors all our dealings. Why then, when presented with the truth for which our souls long, does it sometimes fall on deaf ears? How is it that the fervent enthusiasm of some turns to apathy and distaste? How is it that the heart of man can turn the sweet savor of God's love into bitter

poison? Our lives in Christ are like those Creeping Charlies on the window sill: presented with the same conditions and nutrients, some thrive, some struggle, some peter out, some prove slow off the mark, while others wither and wilt.

In the Parable of the Sower from today's Gospel, Jesus doesn't set out to answer the question of *why* the Word takes root in some and not others, but instead lays out plainly the reality of the situation. It does happen, and not because the word lacks effectiveness, but is instead an inevitable consequence of the human condition, the gift of free will granted to creatures with weak hearts and minds made out of mush.

Some are those who have the word taken from their hearts by the devil, others who have no roots when tempted, or are choked by cares or riches, and some miss out on hearing the word because they skipped out for the Super Bowl...

And while each of us will tend more strongly towards one of these archetypes, I have found that for most of us, we rarely embody one of them, wholly. Rather, in our lives we will shift from one to the other, depending on the situation.

And so, the word must be preached continually, over and over again. And not just preached but received, continually. Just as we receive the Eucharist, over and over again, word and sacrament, re-presented, received again each time, and each time the first time, because each time is the first time we as we are in that moment have *ever* experienced Christ, experiencing a participation in that moment when the Word was made flesh and dwelt with us, suffered because of us, and defeated death for us so that we might live *with* and *in* Him. The word became flesh, His death and resurrection at a particular time and a particular place radiating out and filling all time and every place, which we experience anew each time our time-bound limited selves encounter it.

But just as we are each in some way a seed in the parable, each of us in our own way *can* and *will* be to some other seedling, the sun that feeds, the water that sustains, or the soil that nourishes, but we also must be aware that we could be the wind that scatters, or water that's pure alkaline (natu'lly mean water), or even the devil in the flesh.

This is Saint Paul's point in the opening of today's epistle, "Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face." The church in Corinth had been swayed by false apostles, twisting Paul's words and corrupting the Word. We can only truly become rooted in the Word if the soil is fertile; if not, if it has been salted, then hope of abiding in our faith is diminished.

Thus, we *hear* God's Word, we *receive* His Word, we *partake* of the Word made Flesh, and become transformed, *living* out the Word, *preaching* the Word by our every breath and heartbeat.

And you, each and every one of you, has progressed farther along that path than you realize, each of you has put down deeper roots than you know. How do I know this?

"Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

If in today's parable and Jesus's explanation of it, a chord is struck, if you can nod in recognition with a particular example, then the Word has been planted in your heart. For to the spiritually deaf and blind, Jesus's parable is meaningless; but if instead a spark of recognition is kindled, however small and sputtering, a relationship has been established. God's plan for us, from the beginning, involved reciprocity. His love freely given must be received, however feebly.

And therein lies both the answer to our conundrum of why some hear the word as but mere sound waves striking the eardrum and stimulating aural nerve or seeing but do not perceive. God has given us the ability of receiving His love. He pours out His love, unbidden, over abundant, transcending space and time, supernaturally powerful, and yet, We are granted the gift of denying Him. His love for us is so great that He is willing to be unloved in return. He has given us the gift to say 'No'. He has given us the freedom to choose good and eschew evil. It is a gift far beyond those of any other creature. We are granted the freedom to say 'no' because

it is only where a 'no' is possible that a 'yes' can be unequivocal. We can say 'Yes' to His love and in that freedom from obligation can love Him and others as He Himself loves, but our first instinct is to say 'no' to Him because our disordered hearts see shiny baubles and grasp at the glittery object not yet comprehending that the dazzling lights come not from the object but from the sun. We take the light for granted or fear it is too far away to ever reach.

But it is when we realize our folly, that we need not reach the Sun through our own efforts, but the Son came down to lift us up to the heavens, we, in some small way, begin to see at the heart of our conundrum, the puzzlement over the human condition and our fallen natures, of why we cannot always keep to Him through thin and thick, is the reality that the source of all our heartache is in the corruption of His gift and the only way to heal our brokenness is not in fixing it so that we can love God but to admit our brokenness, glorying in our infirmities, and receive His love as best as we can, right now. Right now, none of us love as we ought, but all may love as they can, reaching out so that He may lift us up to Himself, hearing the word with a noble and good heart, keeping it and bearing fruit with patience.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*