

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 16, 2023

I believe that we all want our lives to matter, don't we? I know I do. I want this world to be different because I was here, different because of the choices I made, different because I lived my life believing that it was possible. Isn't that true with you too? And of course, I don't want just any sort of difference. I want this world to be a little BETTER because of me. To use imagery we just heard, I want my life to bear good fruit.

God wants those same sorts of things. Of course, in one sense it's sort of silly to talk about God in that way. We know that the way we "think" and the way we talk about ourselves is drastically inadequate when we use those same ways to talk about God. Yet, it is all we have. And honestly, it can be quite helpful to try nonetheless, as we struggle to put into words that which is far beyond anything we can imagine. And so with that in mind, I say again - God wants those same sorts of things, wants this world to be better, wants his creation to bear good fruit, wants each of our lives to "matter".

St. Paul uses all sorts of descriptive language in his Letter to the Romans as he writes about creation. Listen again.

**“ . . . for creation awaits with eager expectation
the revelation of the children of God;” and**
**“ . . . that creation itself would be set free
from slavery . . .” and**
**“ . . . all creation is groaning in labor pains
even until now;”**

That imagery is really powerful, especially that last one, the idea that God's creation is sort of in the throes of, or on the brink of, or struggling to - give birth, give life - bring about something beautiful and wonderful and desperately needed. It's the idea that there is a kind of incompleteness

and brokenness to this world since the Fall, and that creation has been groaning and longing to return to Eden once again.

And St. Paul believes, and we do too, that this Jesus - God's Word made flesh, has changed absolutely everything, has now made possible (through his death and resurrection and sending of the Spirit) a newness of life for all of creation (starting now and continuing into eternity). Jesus came to heal this world. He came to redeem it. Divinize it. Transform it. And so, there exists possibilities that had been lost for so long, possibilities for this world to grow closer and closer to the Eden God first created. But we're not there yet.

And so, creation groans in labor. And we groan in labor as we long for and await the life promised to us and won for us, we groan as we struggle with knowing both what the world has not yet become and what it can be. That's the world God wants, a world full of good fruit, full of beauty and kindness and mercy and love. God wants the world to be different, he died so the world could be different. And remarkably, he wants us to help bring it about, wants us to be that difference by our deeds.

Is that what we want too?

We just heard the well-known Parable of the Sower. And near the end of that story we heard Jesus say,

“But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, . . .”

This is the seed that yields a hundred or sixty or thirty fold. And this is precisely who we are called to be, people who bring about an abundance of life to a world that needs it. And Jesus mentions two things. First, we need to hear the word, and The Word is Jesus. We do that first by believing that God truly wants to communicate to us, and then by actively listening to the words of Scripture, in the silence of our hearts, in the

teachings of the Church, in the loving counsel of people we respect, in all sorts of faithful ways.

The second thing Jesus mentions is “understanding”. After hearing the word, hearing the voice of God, we must do our best to understand it. I don’t have to tell you that this is the tricky part, for far too often we simply conform the word of God to our lives (instead of the other way around). Put another way, if we convince ourselves that we don’t really have to be loving people, or we don’t have to love our enemies, or don’t have to forgive, or don’t have to be generous, we aren’t truly “understanding” it at all.

And there is a third step, one not mentioned in the text, yet one essential to bearing good fruit. Once we’ve “heard”, and once we’ve “understood”, we must “accept” it. In other words, we must be willing to put into practice those things we hold in faith, those things we believe to be the voice of God revealing himself to us.

Hear, understand and accept.

Three small words which, if lived out in faith, can assure us that our lives will make a positive difference in this world, that we will truly bear good fruit, that we will help make this world a little better, a little closer to the beautiful, bountiful place God created it to be.

Short Story

There once was a farmer who grew award-winning corn. Each year he entered his corn in the state fair where it won a blue ribbon. One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew it. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbors. How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbors when they are entering corn in competition with yours each year?" the reporter asked. "Why sir," said the farmer, "didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbors grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will

steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbors grow good corn."