

July 12, 2026 – Isaiah 55:10-13 & Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

This morning has been a little different than most Sundays. Usually we gather, we sing our opening hymn, we confess our sins, we hear God's Word, and we receive His gifts. Today we began by witnessing something else before all of that: a wedding.

Now, most weddings have a certain expectation about them. We picture a young couple just beginning life together. We imagine buying a first home. Building a family. Those are wonderful blessings from God, and many marriages begin that way.

But today's wedding reminds us that God is not limited to only one kind of beginning. Today we witnessed the marriage of two people who have already known much of life's joy and much of its sorrow. They have both loved and lost. They have both walked through grief. And now, in His kindness, God has brought them together.

And one of the things that struck me as we were talking in premarital counseling was not simply that they love one another, though they certainly do. It's that they spoke repeatedly about wanting to serve Christ together. About encouraging one another in the faith, praying together, supporting the work of LWML and the missionary activities of the church, and using their life together for the sake of His kingdom.

That may not sound like the reason our world expects people to get married. But it sounds remarkably like the lessons God has placed before us today.

The prophet Isaiah begins with a picture that everyone in ancient Israel understood. Because, in an arid climate like Palestine and an agricultural society like Judah had, everything revolves around rain.

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth."* God doesn't send rain and snow for its own sake. It falls to accomplish something. It waters the ground. It causes seeds to sprout. It provides bread for those who are hungry. Every drop has a purpose because it comes from the Lord.

*"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose."* God's Word is like the rain. Wherever He sends it, it accomplishes His purpose. It creates what He desires. It gives life where before there was none. It always bears fruit.

That promise is one of the great comforts of the Christian faith because so often we can't see what God is doing. Every week I preach a sermon and I have no idea whether anyone is listening. And the same is true in your lives too.

Parents teach their children God's Word and wonder whether it's sinking in. A Christian quietly encourages a friend, says a prayer, gives an offering, visits someone who's lonely, or speaks a word of hope to someone who is hurting, and it all seems so small.

But Isaiah reminds us that God's Word never works in vain. We may not see the harvest today. We may not even see it in this lifetime. But God promises that His Word never returns empty.

Jesus takes up that same image in the Gospel reading. He tells the familiar parable of the sower scattering seed. Some falls on the path. Some on rocky ground. Some among thorns. Some on good soil. Often when we hear this parable, we naturally focus on the different kinds of soil, asking ourselves which one we resemble. And that's certainly one point that Jesus is making.

But notice how the parable ends. It ends with abundance. The seed planted in good soil bears fruit, *"in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."* The goal of the parable is not simply that the seed survives. It's that it bears abundant fruit.

And what is that seed? Well, Jesus tells us that plainly: it's the Word of God. And that means that every bit of fruit in the Christian life begins with God's Word first taking root in us.

Faith itself is fruit. Repentance is fruit. Forgiveness is fruit. Love, patience, generosity, mercy, endurance, encouragement, faithful service, and steadfast hope are all fruits that grow wherever God's Word has taken root.

But that's not the kind of fruitfulness we usually envision. Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't define fruitfulness by age. He doesn't define it by wealth. He doesn't define it by worldly success. He doesn't define it by having children. Instead, fruitfulness is measured by what God's Word produces in a person's life for the good of His kingdom.

And that is good news. Because our world has a way of measuring people by what they produce. Careers define us. Accomplishments define us. Productivity defines us. And once those things begin to fade, the world quietly suggests that perhaps our most useful years – our most fruitful years – are behind us.

Many people reach retirement and wonder, "Now what?" Others lose a spouse and wonder whether there is still purpose ahead. Some never marry. Others never have children. Some have dreamed of things that never came to be. It becomes very easy to wonder whether our opportunity to bear fruit has somehow passed us by. But God says that as long as His Word is still being sown, He is still producing fruit.

Perhaps your greatest work in Christ's kingdom will happen after retirement. Perhaps your greatest contribution will be the prayers you offer faithfully every day. Perhaps your wisdom will strengthen a younger Christian who desperately needs encouragement. Perhaps your generosity will help send missionaries around the world. Perhaps your quiet acts of mercy will comfort someone carrying a burden no one else can see. God alone knows the whole harvest.

And that brings us back to the wedding we witnessed this morning. A husband and wife who have not entered marriage asking, "What can we get?" But have entered marriage asking, "How can we better serve Christ together?"

Their marriage is not simply about companionship, though companionship is one of God's precious gifts. It's not simply about easing loneliness, although that too is a gift from God. Their marriage is another field into which God is planting His Word. It's another place where He intends to bear fruit.

Together they will encourage one another in the faith. Together they will pray. Together they will support the spread of the Gospel. Together they will use the gifts God has entrusted to them in service to His Church. That's the harvest God always intended.

And in that sense, today's wedding is not merely the joining of two lives. It's another reminder that God is still at work. The same Lord who sends rain upon the earth continues to send His Word into hearts. The same Lord who causes seed to grow continues to produce a harvest that only He can fully see.

Isaiah concludes our Old Testament lesson with one of the most joyful pictures in all of Scripture: *"You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."*

Creation itself rejoices at the success of God's saving work. At seeing his promises come true. At seeing his kingdom grow. That joy belongs to us as well.

For every one of us is a field for that same life-giving Word. In Holy Baptism, God planted His promise in us. Week after week He continues to water that faith through His Word and His Sacraments. Again and again He forgives our sins, strengthens our faith, and nourishes us with the body and blood of His Son.

He has not finished His work in any of us. Not in the young. Not in the old. Not in the newly married. Not in the widowed or the widower. Not in the retired. Not in those who wonder whether they still have anything left to offer.

The great Farmer is not finished with His field. He is still watering. Still planting. Still pruning. Still causing growth. Still bringing forth fruit.

Only when Christ returns will the harvest finally be complete. Then we will see what we cannot yet see. Then we'll discover all the ways God's Word quietly accomplished His purpose through lives that often seemed quite ordinary. We'll marvel at the harvest He produced by His grace alone.

Until that day, may He continue to make each one of us good soil, rejoicing to receive His life-giving Word and eager to bear whatever fruit He chooses, thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold, all to the glory of Christ our Lord. Amen.