

[OPENING SLIDE]

"Rooted for Life"

[Open with praying the Collect of the Word]

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 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, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

"This is a homecoming, but not to the old city, to a home, an urban home, a city as a true home." [Brueggemann, "The City in Biblical Perspective: Failed and Possible," in *Word and World* 14:3, 248]

Introduction

[Video lead in ...]

In my files, I have a Peanuts cartoon that opens with Linus just *sighing* ... to which Lucy responds, "Stop that stupid sighing!" "It's scriptural!" says Linus, who proclaims: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with *sighs* too deep for words. Romans ... 8th chapter." Lucy, w/a grimace concludes: "I don't know ... I'm either going to have to slug him, or start going back to Sunday school!"

[SLIDE # 2] *"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven ..."* on full display in God bringing *creation* to life ... but more, in these latter days, bringing us Jesus – the incarnate Word – the true Word – for us and for our *salvation!* Where, ultimately salvation is God's gift, "to which human beings need only open their hearts with rejoicing and their voices with song." [Hanson, Isaiah 40-66, 182]

Main Point:

The means to do this – to bring us to this "homecoming"? [Brueggemann] The life-giving Word of God – embodied in Christ, written down for us and our life in Him.

[SLIDE # 3]

READ to rely upon ... LEARN to live in ... MARK to mature by ... DIGEST to declare this life-giving and saving Word ... rooting us for life in Christ.

Amen.

"Any clear vision of the future starts with hope." [Thomas, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:218] And what I'd like to attempt to do this morning is offer you that hope. I don't want to be so bold to call it an "I have a dream" speech, but as we look to our well-being in this world, I want to hold out to you a *possibility*, inviting prayerful reflection, and a full on response.

[SLIDE # 4] It's what the prophet Isaiah was inspired to do, as the Spirit of the Lord opens the 55th chapter of his prophecy. Israel is in distress. They're cut off from hope ... namely, because they've rebelled and cut themselves off from the Lord' life-giving Word. So – just like our missionary Father – He calls them back [55:1-2]:

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

I mean, who wouldn't accept an invitation like that? Especially if one was feeling lost, or in a state of distress? Who wouldn't honor the summons to go on such a life-affirming journey ... esp. if you knew that your life could be better?

[SLIDE # 5] Personally, I've never considered myself a visionary, a disciple – like Peter or Paul – to be imitated [1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1]. But there is *one thing* I want you to imitate: a desire to abide in God's Word. Imitate my firm belief that if there is any certainty for this life or the next ... if there is any hope for our todays and tomorrows, it will come only from one place: the life-giving Word of the Lord.

No doubt, many of you have a story about how that is true. Where, for me, it's my hope every time I prepare to bring you God's Word, a prayer I just prayed:

[SLIDE # 6] *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Where, unworthy as I am to come to this moment, You, O Lord, have made me worthy. Therefore, let this Word have its full effect – first, in my own life, and then, when it has done its holy work in me, in the lives of those whom You have entrusted to my care, all to Your glory, and for our life and witness in Jesus' name. Amen."*

Where, having preached roughly 3,000 sermons in my lifetime, I will boldly say, that that prayer has never been answered "No!" It may not have been the prettiest sermon or Bible study, but by God's grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit, it did what it was supposed to do.

So, again, how about you? For this is what the Lord is promising today.

Not a short-lived solution simply to get us over the next hurdle ... not some pious wish – but a reality for any and all who would accept the Lord’s invitation – for any and all who prayerfully and faithfully “read, learn, mark and inwardly digest” what God has to offer. God’s Word is that powerful, that effective ... that gracious.

[SLIDE # 7] IT IS A WORD THAT IS ALWAYS GOING OUT.

¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that GOES OUT from my mouth ...

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” [Hebrews 1:1]

Such is God’s nature – always going out from Himself – who’s Word is spoken not simply to hear Himself talk, but so that it will fall like rain and snow upon those to whom it is spoken ... the Word, finally embodied in Jesus.

We can still hear the Father saying:

“Go forth my Son, my Word. Hold nothing back. Spare no expense. Let the world see Me in You. Reveal my heart to them. Let them know how much I love and desire to share my life with them.”

[SLIDE # 8] IT IS A WORD THAT also ALWAYS RETURNS FULL.

It SHALL NOT return to me EMPTY (handed, null/void, without cause or effect)...

Like the promise held out to Israel coming out of their wilderness ...

*“[Mine] is no **empty** word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”*

[Deuteronomy 32:47]

Who of us wants to live? To thrive? To grow? It can be! Our God ordains it. The Son confirms it, as God’s Word ever goes out ... as that Word that always returns ... full ... and thirdly:

[SLIDE # 9] IT IS A WORD THAT ALWAYS ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSE/INTENT.

But it SHALL ACCOMPLISH that which I purpose, and SHALL SUCCEED in the thing for which I sent it.

When other foundations crumble and give way ... when uncertainty faces us on every side ... when fear clouds our future or cripples our present ... when sin, and death, and hell sadistically seek to see our faith undone, one foundation stands! The promise of salvation and life granted through God's life-giving word.

And the blessed result?

[SLIDE # 10]

¹² "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace ...

Not in some manufactured way, but in true heartfelt joy ... not with some artificial peace, but a true abiding calm – one forged by Calvary's cross – in the forgiveness of sins – one in which everything is "divinely normal." [Franzmann]

What else?

[SLIDE # 11]

The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Yes, when we abide in the Word, life will look different. The world is so foreboding. Mountains will loom large, and valleys deep and dark will remain. But they will be scalable. Because of a particular mountain [Calvary], and one particular tree [the Cross], those mountains and valleys will not be the end of us.

Yes, when we feel lost and want to find him – or better, to be found by him – we know where to look. Where His Word is, there He will be. Where, in that "Crèche of Christ" we discover something wonderful: that Jesus has already been looking for us. Where, if I should ask, "Lord, how can I be sure you love me?" He simply says, "Friend, you have my Word." And that is enough. [Coleman, *CPR*, 3:3, 34]

Where, the third blessed result of a Word that goes out, returns full, and accomplishes what God sends it out to accomplish is ...

[SLIDE # 12]

¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

What is this “*everlasting sign*”? This living memorial?

Certainly a Word to call us home – when we drift too far – the Lord’s summons to “come home” ... to repentance ... to forgiveness ... to faith.

But more, a lasting covenant to His redeemed ones, that whether in exile or at home, His Word will endure forever. Indeed, He Himself is that abiding presence among us, which is our real hope. [Adapted from Thomas, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:222]

[SLIDE # 13] So there is the vision ... AN INVITATION, really: Be a people of the Word. In fact, is it too small a vision for this Pastor that each and every one of us in this congregation would be engaged in some form of Bible study? Perhaps one of these [*recount some of the offerings for this coming season*].

Yes, make my joy complete! [Philippians 2:2; 2 John 1:12]

Conclusion

[SLIDE # 14] Wherein, finally, my motivation in desiring this? To feel good about myself? So that it’ll look really good on next year’s statistical report? Or perhaps, it’s because I love you, and I desire the best for us all – believing that God’s Word can and will deliver what it promises. That our life within – and within/without these walls – will be better.

Where, in another Peanuts cartoon, Linus is getting ready for Sunday school. Whereupon entering class he sheepishly says, “I’m sorry ma’am ... I couldn’t study my Sunday school lesson this week. The zipper on my Bible is stuck.” If that were our only excuse!

Whereby, having been blessed by the Word, not only will our lives be changed, but that Word will cause us to be a blessing to others. Embodying the Word of God in the world, others will be blessed by the power of that Word through you.

[SLIDE # 15]

READ to rely upon ... LEARN to live in ... MARK to mature by ... DIGEST to declare this life-giving and saving Word ... rooting us for life in Christ.

Who’s in?

Amen.

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[Friday E-mail:] Those who watch *The Food Network* are probably familiar with the show called "Chopped." It's a reality cooking show in which 4 contestants – using exotic ingredients – attempt to cook the most appealing three-course meal. With each successive round one contestant is eliminated until it's down to the final two.

In several episodes entitled "Redemption," it came down to Lance and one other contestant. Lance is an unassuming chef, serving mostly as a chef at a Christian camp in the Adirondacks. Where, throughout the competition, he consistently makes reference to his faith as his inspiration for why he cooks. In the end, he prevails ... to the tearful distress of his competitor.

However, just as the judges customarily dismiss the final loser, Lance said to his competitor, "Wait!" Where, in a totally unexpected twist, never before seen in previous seasons of the show – Lance offers a portion of his winnings to purchase a plane ticket so that his competitor can fly to France to see her ailing grandmother. In the most unlikely of places, before a national audience, a man's quiet and unassuming faith transforms yet a small piece of this planet, one soul at a time.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 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, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Such is the text for this Sunday's sermon - **Isaiah 55:10-11**. If you'd like to get the full flavor of what Isaiah is calling us to, read all of chapter 55. Where, into a world of selfishness and sin, the prophet holds out a beacon, a mooring, something to which we can tether our very lives: namely, the life-giving Word of the Lord. It alone is that one sure foundation upon which we may build.

I'd love for you to hear more about that: first, during this Sunday's Bible Class/ Sunday school hour. I invite you to sample the studies being offered this fall. Meet the leaders. Enjoy some fellowship prepared by our In Team. Then, during our worship service, I'll be laying out a vision for the study of God's Word. Where, there is still time to sign up for the Orientation/fellowship following worship. I hope you'll be there. Where, I leave you with a quote from Martin Luther:

"I must place the Word of God above everything. I must hazard life and limb, the world's favor, my property, honor, and all my welfare that I may keep it and cling to Christ as to my most precious Treasure in heaven and on earth."

God's Word *is* that treasure, which I'd love to explore it with you ... where with spade in hand we might come to discover its inestimable riches together! SYOS!