

# My Word Shall Accomplish

Proper 10

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Isaiah 55:10-13

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Repeat after me. This (This) Is (Is) An (An) Echo (Echo). (Motion to stop with hands.)

Repetition of words like we just made is one form of echo. While Anna and I were out in Colorado, I thought we might hear another form of echo: the sound of our voices carried back to us from the mountains. We didn't; but that's because the time it seemed most certain to happen—Echo Canyon—we were lost and were trying to find our way to a visitor's center. We did, however, hear a couple congregation members echo the words of their vacancy pastor last weekend. While in Utah, we attended church right after a rodeo. The pastor joked that the responses to the prayers would be "Yeehaw," and had it echoed back to him at one point during the sermon. We human beings are not the only ones to know about echoes.

Bats and some other creatures also use them. They use them to quote-unquote "see." It is the very way in which they can navigate their surroundings, and in which they can locate prey on which to feed.

In the Lutheran Worship hymnal, the old blue book, you can read how we repeat back what we have heard from God when we worship. This is how it says it works: "Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God. Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure (p.6)."

In most of these cases, the echoes are made and the sound is returned without the sound making an impression on the item off of which it is reverberating. It does not make an impression when we repeat random phrases or when animals use echolocation. But it does make an impression when we make our repetition of God's Word.

We learn in our Old Testament text that God's Word does not return empty, but accomplishes the work for which it was sent. It is true that echolocation accomplishes work for the creature using it, but it does not help that animal's prey. God's Word, though, has an effect not only on those to whom we repeat it, but also on us. This morning, we'll hear how this works as we turn to our text from Isaiah chapter fifty-five.

## Verse 1

Switching gears from echoes, God speaks through Isaiah and compares His Word to the falling of rain and snow. "For as the rain and 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 empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Unlike echoes, the rain and snow do not return. They accomplish a purpose on the fields and trees and earth, but they do not return to the skies as rain and snow. Visiting some of my friends in Utah, Anna and I learned that they were hoping for rain. Where my friends lived in Vernal, Utah, there was a mountain range which would cause a lot of the rain to jump over them. They would get thunder and lightning, but not the rain. On the other hand, Kansas did not have mountains; and Anna and I drove into a rain storm pouring what seemed like buckets sloshing down upon us. We had to stop a few times just to see the road ahead of us.

Nevertheless, in both Vernal and Kansas, plants were growing. Vernal, Utah, had some shrub like plants and a few trees and some grass. Kansas had lush green grass and fields of green and yellow, with some combines already out harvesting the wheat. In both of these cases God sent the rain and made the vegetation yield fruits. So it is when His Word goes out. It may bring a small crop of shrubs or it may bring a large crop of wheat; yet His Word always accomplishes the tasks for which He sends it.

And what are those tasks? To bring sinners to repentance, and to bring the repentant ones to life everlasting. Wherever God's Word is proclaimed, people either acknowledge that they are sinners and that they have done wrong in repentance, or they get angry and turn against the one who is speaking God's Word to them—you might recall how pastors are treated sometimes from our texts just a few weeks ago. But for the repentant person, hearing God's Law only makes him or her feel worse, and that's when the Gospel is need to do its work. It—the Gospel—tells that person that what was done was wrong, but that it has been forgiven. Jesus Christ has taken that punishment upon Himself and that person no longer has to be punished. Hearing this news causes the repentant person to break forth in singing, and that person is not alone. Just look at our next verse.

## Verse 2

“For 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.”

Through His prophet Isaiah, God tells us that the mountains and hills shall break forth into singing. I don't know about you, but I've heard repentant people singing in joy over being forgiven. But the whole time that Anna and I were in Colorado and Utah, I never heard the mountains sing—not even last Sunday morning during worship. Yes, not even a “Yeehaw.”

Is literal singing really what God is getting at? Or, to ask the good old Lutheran question, what does it mean that the mountains and hills will start singing? For one thing, no, God doesn't mean literally. He is using a figure of speech to describe the joy that will be had when He brings His people out from captivity. The captivity that Isaiah's hearers would soon find themselves in was the Babylonian Captivity; and they would soon be overjoyed to get out from it. For us, the captivity is the captivity of sin, from which we are overjoyed to be removed.

Now you might be wondering about how often you find yourself singing in joy. You might doubt that you are overjoyed all of the time. And you might be concerned if you are a Christian or not because you aren't singing all the time. Being able to make music for your entire life is not what this means.

*You* are a sinner. *You* have broken God's Law. *You* deserved God's punishment of hell forever. But *you* are also a saint. *You* have been forgiven. *You* have received Jesus' righteousness in place of your own. In Christ, *you* are worthy of eternal life. And you are currently living it. So why aren't you singing? You are living the Christian life.

I recently heard a Christian comedian say that the Christian life is “interesting.” He said for him the best word to describe it is not joyous, or victorious, or other things—it's “interesting.” When you live the Christian life, proclaiming God's Word, things are going to happen. Some of those things will be happy and joyous. Some of them will cut you to your very soul with how negative the unbelievers can be toward you when you speak about the faith. Other things will be hard because Satan is actively against the spread of God's Word, and so he makes it as hard as he can to spread it. So living as a Christian, as a saint and a sinner at the same time,

every day, living in repentance and hearing the proclamation of the Gospel on Sunday mornings, is, well, interesting. But it is also victorious, in Christ crucified and risen for you. Now I know that I have been echoing that Christian comedian's use of the word "interesting" more times than you might care for; but again, God's Word is more than just an echo back, it accomplishes things. It brings you to recognize and confess your sin, but even more, it causes you to see your Savior, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, your life is only beginning, and it will lead to greater things, as the last verse of our text shows us.

### Verse 3

“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.”

This last verse makes another echo, but one which we have not covered yet. It is the echo of how things had been in Genesis before the fall into sin. As the perfect life before sin has gone out from us, in Christ Jesus, it will echo back.

If you look closely, you'll notice that many of the things which became curses in the book of Genesis either have been or will be restored in Jesus' death and resurrection. With the Tower of Babel, languages were separated so that humanity could not understand one another. In Christ, God's Word started to be spread at Pentecost in the languages of all known peoples so that all those gathered could hear the Gospel of salvation in Jesus. The spread of His Word continues today in the work being done at the International Center in St. Louis. At the Center, God's Word is being composed into every known language; and another translation is begun every time a new dialect is found.

Here in our last verse, the curse of the thorny ground is reversed. “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress.” And just as the thorns came about as a result of God's Word, so, too, shall the change back. God has spoken and it will happen. Creation will echo His proclamation.

And you, dear friends in Christ, will be there to see it because God's Word has not only echoed off of you, but it has taken root in you. You have heard and you believe that Jesus' death and resurrection was in your place for the forgiveness of your sins and you have eternal life. May His Word not remain stuck with you but be echoed out to the north and the south, to the east and the west so that all people might hear what God has done through your Savior, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen.