

Lectionary 15 A 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Rain falls to earth. Water touches seeds near the surface of the soil. The water softens the seed covering, making it easy for the inside to burst out. Part of the seed forms a stem, reaching for the sunlight; part of the seed forms roots, reaching deeper into the soil for nutrients – and more water. More rain falls, acting as a transportation system, like a series of canals or blood pulsing through vessels, to bring the nutrients out of the soil to the green part of the plant. Where water, the H₂O molecule, is used in the process of photosynthesis – that is, the plant makes sugars for further growth. And after the plant has fed and grown, the plant converts oxygen and hydrogen back into water. This happens through the process of cellular respiration. The plant releases water molecules, and carbon dioxide, often through the underside of leaves. That water vapor rejoins clouds.

Scientists can go into much greater detail about how plants use water (including chemical formulas). As a theologian, I say, this is an example of God's purpose. We hear the words of the Lord in our first reading, "my word shall be like the rain and the snow, accomplishing my goals." And our God's goals are intricate, as any scientist can tell you. More intricate than the most detailed piece of handwork, or computer code.

The verses right before our first reading contain marvelous words that remind us of our limitations as humans, as another of God's creatures: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God sends the rain and snow to water the earth to accomplish God's great purpose: providing food. Seeds for those who sow seeds, which grow into plants and fruits and grain, harvested and made into bread for us who eat. Ah, but we have been humbled by the reminder of how much greater God's thoughts and ways are than our thoughts and ways. In the first verses of this chapter, God is in the marketplace, with water, milk, wine, bread, and other good things to eat. But God is not selling; God is giving it away. That is how God is with these people – blessing them with abundance.

We begin to sense that God's great purpose of feeding us is not the end of either God's greatness or God's purpose. And, indeed, in this chapter, the Lord is encouraging the Israelites in exile in Babylon to return to Israel. Their homeland. But a homeland more for their grandparents and great grandparents. God's word to these 3rd and 4th generation exiles is go back to the land. And the Lord will shower them with blessings. As abundant as a market with everything for free. And in these closing verses, we hear the assurance that when these exiles go back, even the inanimate mountains and hills will sing. They will make their way through the desert, from present day Iraq to present day Israel, shaded by towering cypress trees and

flowering myrtle trees. They won't have to deal with all the sticker bushes that God usually appoints in desert regions.

Yes, God has a purpose. And God will ensure that God's purpose is accomplished. Perhaps intricately. But God will certainly accomplish God's purpose emphatically.

Jesus speaks of sowing seeds, too. This sower of seeds doesn't do it the way the farmers in Nebraska did. I used to ride in a tractor during seed-planting season. Sixteen bins full of seeds on the ends of the implement, and sixteen bins of fertilizer to go in the same hole as the seed. Some of the tractors had GPS, programmed so that when the tractor got to a part of the field that the farmer had identified as being poor soil, it wouldn't put seed and fertilizer there. Very efficient. This sower, on the other hand, is throwing seed anywhere and everywhere. Which seems wasteful. But the sower doesn't seem to care. Or perhaps the sower's thoughts and ways are different from our thoughts and ways. The sower gives chances. The sower has hopes that the seed will make a difference, even for those who encounter trouble or persecution. The sower has hope for those burdened by the cares of the world and drawn by the lure of wealth. The sower has hope for those whose hearts lean toward evil thoughts. So the wildly inefficient sower sows. And according to Jesus, the Word of God, the sower is rewarded with wildly extravagant yields.

When we were baptized, the water poured over our heads, and so did God's word. The hymn goes, "We were baptized in Christ Jesus." And that is true. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." And we are in Christ Jesus. That baptismal water and God's word are still fulfilling God's purpose. Softening us. Making sure we receive the nutrients available: God's good and gracious word. The bread and wine full of grace. The water and word of baptism are fulfilling God's purpose of us growing: serving faithfully in large and small ways. Through this building project, and the building project of our ASP group. Through our efforts to be kind toward those who differ from us, in age, race, economic status, power. God will is done in straightforward ways – but also intricate ways. Ways we cannot begin to understand. The water and word of baptism are accomplishing God's intricate purpose of bringing us and those who encounter God's grace through us back to where God wants us to be: closer. Thankful. Fruitful. Amen