



"Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), Mauritshuis, The Hague, © Web Gallery of Art. In what may be the most famous pearl in art, the pearl is a symbol of chastity, reminiscent, according to St. Francis de Sales, of the pearl that Isaac sent to Rebecca as a first token of his love. St. Francis de Sales said that the pearl as an earring has special meaning, *i.e.*, that no word or sound should enter the ear other than "the sweet sound of chaste words, which are the oriental pearls of the gospel." Similarly, in the Gospel lesson Sunday, Jesus tells what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, including what in the King James Version was called "the pearl of great price".

### Ultimately, the Success or Failure of God's Word Does Not Rest with Those Who Hear It, But in the Faithfulness of God Who Sends It Forth.

An apparent contradiction appears between the words of Isaiah (Is. 55:1-5, 10-13) and those of Jesus (Mt. 13:1-9, 18-23), because in the Isaiah text "God's Word is powerful, active, and it always . . . achieves the purposes set forth for it by God," but in the Parable of the Sower, "that doesn't seem to be the case," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his July 13 sermon.

"And so we're left asking, 'Which is it?' Who is right? Isaiah or Matthew? Let's try to answer that question by looking more closely at the Parable of the Sower.

"The passage as we have it," he continued, "actually consists of the parable itself, and an interpretation. The interpretation seems to indicate that what happens to the seed (the Word of God or the Gospel message) depends on the type of soil where it lands. For example, the success of the message depends, in large part, on those receiving it." Some are indifferent, or shallow (with "hidden agendas and other priorities"), or cluttered ("filled with the interests of the world and materialistic ambitions"), but some are responsive and "welcome the Word, hunger for righteousness, and long for meaningful purpose in life."

"But when we focus such great attention on the receivers of the Word, we can easily lose sight of another important focus of this parable. The central focus . . . of the parable is God's divine initiative, not human response. That's why it's called the Parable of the Sower. In the parable itself, the picture Jesus paints is of the sower's liberality and generosity. The seed is sown all over the place, generously and indiscriminately. . . . The scattering of the seed with such abandon here in the parable thus reflects the lavish, prodigal nature of God's grace to us and to all persons.

"Now it is true that the very nature of God's communicating his grace in this lavish way implies a harvest. The principle of sowing and reaping teaches us this. If you sow seed generously and abundantly, you will reap a harvest. I understand that.

"But this truth should not shift our attention away from the power of God's Word itself, from its life-giving, mysterious, supernatural energy. All the powers of our hearts, souls, minds and strength (*i.e.*, all aspects of human receptivity taken together) would never yield an increase if it were not God's Word that was being planted deep within those who hear it. This seems to me to be the message not only of this parable, but also of Isaiah 55. God's Word is powerful. It accomplishes all that God sets for it to do. *How* it does so is often beyond our human capacity (p. 2→)

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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

**For the poor:** Meat; fresh produce; canned fruits and vegetables; dairy products; peanut butter; cooking oil; pancake mix; syrup; spices; diapers; baby wipes; bathroom tissue; for personal care: soap, shampoo, conditioner, razors, shaving cream; new underwear (adults and children); cleaning supplies; bleach.

**Readings, 7/27:** 1 Kings 3:1-12; Ps. 119:21-136; Rom. 8:26-34; Mt. 13:31-32, 44-50. **8/3:** Neh. 9:16-20; Ps. 78:14-20, 23-25; Rom. 8:35-39; Mt. 14:13-21.

**Prayer Emphases:** St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Roman Catholic Church; Bread of Life Fellowship, Boise, and the Rev. Joel Van Heugen; Evangelicals for Social Action; parishioners on Pomona Road.

(Sermon, cont'd.) to understand. *That* it does so is a fact . . . . It is a message . . . that God's grace is free *to* all and *in* all. . . . But for those who prefer to focus on those who are recipients . . . this parable becomes a word of comfort and encouragement to any who have sown Gospel seed in the lives of others, only to be met with indifference or rejection. . . . Ultimately, the success or failure of God's Word does not rest with those who hear it, but in the faithfulness of God. . . . The fact that we or others do not always hear the Word adequately does not constitute a crop failure on God's part. So take heart."