



certainly hurt our neighbor if we do. Thus, the Devil turns God's Word around against you. Do not be surprised. Satan did the same thing to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve confessed, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die'. But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Gen 3:3-5).

Satan did the same thing to Jesus. In Matthew Ch. 4 we read, "Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (v. 5-6).

If Satan sought to tempt even the Son of God with Scripture, how much more so can and will he do the same to you! Thanks be to God our Great High Priest, Jesus, knew Scripture better than Satan does. "Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (v. 7).

Let us not put the Lord to the test, using one verse of Scripture at the expense of another. God commands us to care for the welfare of our neighbor. God also commands that we be in Church. So we must keep all God's commandments; never one without another. This past year has been the clearest "time of testing" in many of our lives. Yet what Satan seeks to use for our bad, God uses for our good.

God uses for good the seed snatched and scorched, and even that which is choked out. The cares and riches and pleasures of life get in the way when this happens. When the seed falls among the thorns, this is like those thinking, "I don't need to go to Church. I have – insert whatever number of blessings you can think of."

Then there's the seed that falls on good soil. It yields a hundredfold! What a seed! Sweet corn if you're lucky bears one good, healthy ear. The seed that is God's Word yields a hundredfold! Imagine a corn stalk like that. That's how stories like Jack and Beanstalk get started! But that is the power of God's Word! It bears fruits beyond expectations. "He who has ears to hear, let him keep on hearing" Jesus says. In other words, good soil is sitting right where you are, listening to and trusting God's Word that you hear. Keep on coming to hear it.

Last week, if you were at the 10:30 service, you couldn't have missed what transpired when an ornery little fella didn't want to come up for Communion with his mother. "I DON'T WANT TO" he screamed at the top of his lungs from the back of the Church, all the way up, and on through nearly the entire Distribution. I almost lost it; not anger, but in tears. For while that little boy who happens to be my son did not know what he was saying in the moment of a temper tantrum, I couldn't help but think how the sinful human flesh manifests its unwillingness even unto adulthood. No, one might not be kicking and screaming while being carried to the altar rails, but 15-20% of our average weekly worship attendance has been missing since last March.

In the Office Hymn today we sang, "Though some be snatched and some be scorched and some be choked and matted flat, the sower sows; his heart cries out, "Oh, what of that, and what of that?" You see, it crushes the sower's heart when he sees that the Word of God is snatched, scorched, choked, and matted flat. It's as if the seed went out and the soil upon which it landed screamed, "I DON'T WANT IT!"

It is incredibly discouraging for not only sower, but the saints who miss their dear brothers and sisters in Christ – "Oh, what of that, and what of that" the hymn so beautifully expresses. But the divine Sower keeps on sowing through his under-sowers. The march goes on. What is sometimes discouraging is often surpassed by something profoundly encouraging, when, as the next verse of the hymn sings, "Of all his scattered plenteousness One-fourth waves ripe on hill and flat, and bears a harvest hundredfold: "Ah, what of that, Lord, what of that!"

Incredible! Those who are born woefully spiritually blind, dead, and God's enemy are not only converted to new life in Christ Jesus through the power of the Word, but also bear fruit in doing the works God has given them to do! A hundredfold measure of unexpected production! What marvelous grace! Jesus says, "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."

For the one who wants to remain in the good soil, keep coming to hear God's Word, and hold it fast! Cling to it! Trust it. And you will bear fruit with patience. What does "Bear fruit with patience" mean? When you hear the Word of God and cling to it, don't be disappointed if it doesn't change you at the snap of a finger. Just as an apple tree takes the entire growing season to produce such edible delights, so also sometimes God's Word sometimes takes longer to work in our hearts than we have patience for. For example, someone struggling with

an addiction, you name the sort. We could be tempted to think, “As soon as I go to Confession, I will instantly overcome my addiction the moment the Pastor pronounces Absolution because God’s Word has power.”

I will confess to you, I once thought this way about my own demons that lure and entice me day to day. But that is not the promise of the power of God’s Word. Besides in stories like Jack and the Beanstalk, is there ever a time when a seed is sown and the next day it is full of ripe fruit? Of course not. Be patient, brothers and sisters. Don’t think that because you are not bearing perfectly ripe fruit as it were, overcoming your pet sins and personal demons perfectly that you are not in good soil. Good soil walks in repentance. “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.” Good soil hears God’s Word, and holds it fast in an honest and good heart. Continue to do what God tells you to do. Repent and hold fast to the Good News that you are forgiven of all your sins. And press the repeat button. Repent and hold fast. Repent and hold fast. God’s Word will continue to work its power in you. You will bear fruit in time – in God’s time. Be patient. God is faithful. He will surely do it as He surely fulfills all His promises. In Jesus’ name, Amen.