



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Sunday Called Sexagesima or the second Sunday before Lent,  
February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

**"...then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." Luke 8:12**

The work of the devil that we will expose today is his opposition to the Word of God when that Word is preached. *Satan takes away the Word of God* from people's minds and hearts so that they cannot believe and be saved. I will just mention three ways that Satan takes the Word away and then three ways that we can counter attack.

But first we need to be clear about what is at stake in the loss of the Word. Why does it matter if Satan takes the Word away from our hearts? It matters in three increasingly crucial ways.

First, if the word does not abide and take root in our heart, we cannot bear any fruit for God. The Word of God is the means used by the Holy Spirit to sanctify his people—to make them fruitful, or loving. So our holiness, our Christ-likeness, our moral newness is torpedoed if Satan takes the Word away from our hearts and minds.

Second, a persistently fruitless hearer of the Word cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." If the Word is taken away from our hearts, we cannot be followers of Jesus.

Which leads us to the final and most fearful consequence of having the Word taken from our hearts. Jesus says in John 15, "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away . . . If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." Ultimately what is at stake if

Satan takes away the Word of God is our salvation. Without the Word of God abiding and taking root in our heart we cannot bear fruit, be disciples, or inherit eternal life. So it matters more than words can express that we not be among those who hear the Word and lose it to the work of Satan.

How then does Satan try to take the word from those who hear? In Mark's account of this parable, chapter 4 verse 15, it says that he does it immediately as soon as the Word is heard to make people inattentive, or cause them to feel ill-will, or to simply be so ignorant of spiritual reality they can't grasp what's being said.

Second, he comes in after the Word has been received with joy and attacks it with hard times including persecution. He convinces some that holding fast to the Word is not worth the trouble.

Third, he comes in where the Word has begun to take root and strangles it with the lie that too many good and pleasurable things are being sacrificed for the Word. Ephesians 2:2-3 teaches that when people follow Satan they are not dragged along against their desires, but are giving in to their ungodly desires. Satan takes away the Word by making us feel that if we hold fast to the Word, we will have to give up something better. He is the great deceiver. And in America he majors on the third soil. He doesn't snatch the Word as much by the threat of persecution as by the deceptive promise that things will go better if you don't get fanatical about the Word of God. And so thousands of people who had made a start with the Word of God give in to his lies and have the Word choked out of their lives.

It should be obvious from these strategies of Satan that we must be prepared to give some serious

counter thrusts. We only have time to deal with Satan's first strategy. But if you successfully counter his attack here, you will probably defeat him later, too. So let me suggest three ways to resist Satan's efforts to defeat the Word of God as you hear it.

Verse 15 says that good soil is the key to a fruitful hearing of the Word. I have said it several times before and no doubt will again: devote some time Saturday night and Sunday morning to prepare your heart for hearing the Word of God. The more you take time to humble yourself and purify your heart in prayer and tune the receiver of your mind into the wavelength of Christ, the more powerfully you will hear the Word and the more deeply you will worship.

Don't play into the hands of Satan by staying up so late Saturday night that you can't stay awake in worship. He constantly lies to you telling you that what you're doing at 10:00 Saturday night is more important than being rested to give your best ear to God's Word on Sunday morning.

Don't play into the hands of Satan by letting the newspaper set the agenda of your Sunday morning meditation. Read a Psalm and pray that God meet you in worship as he never has before.

I believe that if we as a church formed the habit of conscientiously preparing our hearts for hearing God's Word, the Lord might speak with such power that amazing changes would come into our lives for God's glory and for our joy. So let's resolve to take time for meditation and prayer and solitude and quiet walks in the snow, so that the soil of our heart is plowed deep for the Word of God.

And then, listen with all your might to the Word of God. And remember, the Word is in the hymns and in the anthems and in the liturgy and in the organ voluntary, not just in the sermon.

Focusing attention on the Word of God is hard work for us sinners. Add to that Satan's opposition to your attention! If we come with no resolve to work at listening and fight against Satan, we will be fair game for the birds along the path. They will pluck up the seed and we will leave week after week after week with no power to bear fruit.

Focus on the content of the worship. Focus on the words of the prayers and the hymns. Focus on God during the organ prelude and postlude. Privately pray to God whenever there is a non-directed moment. Go hard after God. Don't coast in worship! Again and again Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him

hear." Strive to have those ears and not to be among those who hearing, do not hear and seeing do not see.

In the act of hearing, welcome the Word of God. Verse 15 says, "But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and *accept it* and bear fruit with patience." All the attention in the world will be of no avail if the message heard from God is rejected. So set your mind to be open to the Word of God, even if it is new or demanding. This doesn't mean listening uncritically. Jesus didn't want mindless acquiescence. Neither do Fr. Guy and myself. The admonition is this: when the word of Scripture stands forth plainly, welcome it. Have a receptive attitude, not a resistant one. Love the Word of God. Be like the miser in search of gold and silver. Snatch up the Word of God as precious pearls.

Be like rich black farmland, deeply plowed, free of thorns, free of rocks, moist from the rains of the Spirit, and then receive the power-packed seed of the Word of God. And this church will overflow with fruit—thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. May the Lord destroy the work of the devil and make us a fruitful people by his Word.

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***