

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “Why a Word?”, and is based on the Old Testament reading, Isaiah chapter 55. Let us pray.... Amen.

When everything in life is going well it is not hard to believe and to carry on. In fact, it is easy to share your hope and faith with others when there are no bumps in the road, no challenges, and no dark clouds on the horizon. When everything is going smooth, faith and trust in God are easy, and so is sharing the Good News of Christ with those around you. But what happens when it is not going so well? What happens when dark clouds not only form but are threatening you, your family, your friends, your neighbours—those people you care most about? When God’s saving action is not apparent and completely obvious, things get much more difficult.

This was the case for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament reading today. For a while they had been threatened by a thunderhead, a foreign power they knew they had no real power against. Even more so, when this storm would open up, when Babylon would attack them, the nation of Babylon would crush them, they would make an example of them by destroying their country, their city and the Lord’s temple, and then carry them off into exile to a land not their own. There they would really have felt abandoned, lost, and alone. Carrying on with difficulty was the case for Israel, both before the exile to Babylon with the storm hanging over them, and after being crushed, during their 70 years of exile in Babylon. Things were indeed bleak, the storm clouds were not just on the horizon, the swirling winds, rain, and hail were about to arrive and pummel them.

Does this ever sound familiar in your life? Have you had storm clouds on the horizon threatening you, your livelihood, or those you love? Or, do you now have storm clouds opening up over you and/or those you love right now? Have you felt the helplessness of a flood of water overcome you with what feels like no life preserver to keep you from drowning? The feeling is horrible.

But in the midst of it all hopelessness, God is still with you, the Good Shepherd still beside you, Christ, the Word made flesh, carrying you each step of the way. God provides His comfort and hope through His Word. He did this for the nation of Israel; He continues to do it for us. In the case and time of today’s Old Testament reading, God sent Isaiah to the nation to proclaim God’s Word. First Isaiah rebuked the king for his unfaithfulness and proclaimed to him the extent of the destruction of the coming storm. King Hezekiah’s own house, family, city, and people would be crushed for his, and their unfaithfulness to the One true God. But that was not the end. In chapters 40-55 God provides His Word of comfort and promise to His people. In fact, through Isaiah, God promised an eternal covenant and eternal benefits. The destruction would still happen, but that would not be the end. It would not ever be apparent how everything would work out, but Israel could trust God and His Word of promise to bring them final triumph on the basis of an everlasting covenant founded upon the work of God’s own Servant. And so they waited with God’s Word of comfort, trusting in His Word of promise, deliverance, and redemption.

But really, what is a Word worth? How much can you, or I, count on a word, any word? Words get thrown around all the time. Sometimes words are spoken carelessly. Sometimes

words are spoken in anger. Sometimes words are even used deceitfully. Yet, while there are times when words may appear to be rather insignificant, it can be dangerous to underestimate the power of a word.

This is especially true regarding the Word Isaiah promises in today’s Old Testament reading, for the Word is the power of God. Whether or not the Israelites understood the Word of God (55:8-9), they could trust that His Word is true and would do what it says (e.g. 1 Sam 9:6; 1 Ki 13:1-3; 2 Ki 10:10; 14:25:23:15-20). And whether or not they trusted it, God would still bring it to pass in the person of His Son. He who came once in humility and weakness will come again in glory as the victorious rider called “the Word of God” (Revelation 19:13). (Lessing, *Isaiah* 40-55, CPH, p.667)

For it is through this Word that “...**all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.**” This Word was “**before all things, and in him all things hold together.**” (Colossian 1:16-17) This Word which Isaiah prophesied “**became flesh and dwelt among us**”(John 1:14) to reveal to us the unseen God. This Word Isaiah prophesies is Life and the Light of men (John 1:4). This Word, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, conceived in the Virgin Mary, took on our flesh and sins, and was born in a humble unassuming stable in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ is the Word sent down from heaven to be the bread of life for the world (John 6:32-35). It is this Word made flesh who took our sins upon Himself and who died in our place for our forgiveness and salvation. In the parable of the sower in the today’s Gospel reading, Jesus, the Word made flesh, explains how whole parable revolves around the hearing of God’s Word, and the importance of understanding this Word. In Him there is salvation, the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal life.

But can this Word really be trusted? For the Israelites, the Babylonian propaganda would have sounded persuasive while they were in exile. You can imagine the propaganda: ‘Didn’t Babylon’s gods defeat the God of Israel? Isn’t Yahweh, therefore inferior to Marduk, the god of the Babylonians? And all the talk about a new exodus, it won’t materialize, right?’ Well, No, no, and NO! God’s Word always accomplish that for which he sends it!

Verses 10 and 11 of today’s Old Testament reading are the most comprehensive statement about the Word of God and its effects. They read: “**For as the rain and the 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,¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**”(55:10-11) In short, God’s Word go out and does exactly what God sends it to do. To create light: done. To give life to Adam: done. To deliver Israel, again and again and again: done.

Now the people of Jesus’ time were in an almost identical situation to the predicament the nation of Israel was in during Isaiah’s time. The Jewish people of Jesus’ time were under the rule, control, and oppression of Rome, with no apparent victory of God’s gracious reign and rule. All they were given was the Word. But in Jesus’ actions in His ministry, God’s Word of promise through Isaiah came to fruition in a preliminary way, and the Word of promise of a new

covenant, as Isaiah promised earlier in chapter 55 (Isaiah 55:3), came to fulfillment in an even more complete way through the new covenant in Jesus’ own blood (Lk 22:20). **“Take, eat; this is my body. Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**(Matthew 26:26-28) And all of this as a token of the full redemption of this people at His second coming.

So, these verses also speak to us today. We stand in relation to our Lord’s second coming as the people of Israel did to God’s promise of return from exile and to the promise of a new covenant in the Servant, Jesus Christ. Just like them we wait; we wait for the completion of the promise in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, what was true for them is true for us, as well: God’s Word is powerful, creative, and trustworthy. It can never fail. You can trust it with your life. We will surely come into possession of the promises inheritance of a new creation, as the sons and daughters of the King.

“God’s Word is more powerful than armies, treaties, chariots, horses, as well as every other human might. Only his Word directs history, and this proves that he alone is the true God. The centurion’s confession echoes this same confidence in God’s Word, made flesh in Jesus: “Only say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8)” (Lessing, *Isaiah* 40-55, CPH, p.667) and he was.

We share in this hope having been drowned in flood of water in Holy Baptism, and raised to eternal life in Christ as His Word was spoken into our ears to mark us as His own. There in Baptism you received the gift of forgiveness, deliverance from death and the devil, and were given eternal life. No you and I have the blessed privilege to live in His Word and through it to continue to receive the gifts Christ earned for us and in our place. Christ, the Word and Servant of God, had brought life and salvation to us, and continues to bring it to us through our hearing of His Word and by receiving His Sacrament. Here Christ invites us to come to His table where we receive the Word made flesh on our tongues and in our mouths the body and blood of Christ, broken and shed for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins. Here in Christ, the Word made flesh we have comfort, hope, and peace.

So, why a word? This is the Word of our God which endures forever (40:8), and this Word is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:25). This Word is our life preserver, our life saver—it is comfort in a broken world and He carries us to eternal life! Amen.

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