

11 June 2017
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Words Matter”

Text: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Words matter. We’re hearing that phrase a lot these days. Whether it’s because of someone’s testimony before congress, a president’s tweeting, hurting someone’s feelings, or speaking an unpleasant truth. Words matter. And while that’s certainly true, know this as well: the words that matter most of all are the ones we hear here - God’s words. The words we heard today, and will consider today.

That *in the beginning*, God *spoke*. Words that matter. *Let there be*. And there was. Life. A careful, deliberate, well-planned creation. Nothing left out, nothing left to chance. Complete, all the parts working together. Light and darkness, water and air, seas and land, plants and seeds, stars and planets, fish and birds, animals, and somewhere in there also angels. And then man. When Luther taught about this he said that God created this wonderful place, this wonderful house, furnished it and got it all ready, and then created man and put him into it. All this was for them, the man and woman. To use and enjoy. They had *dominion over* it all - not to dominate it and abuse it - but to care for and tend this wonderful gift God had given them. For they, unlike all the rest of creation, were created *in the image of God*. And *it was good*. *Each piece* was good, but all of it *together*, working together in harmony, with nothing else needed - that *was very good*.

Words matter.

At His ascension, Jesus tells His disciples to *speak*. But not just any word. Not words of their own thinking, wisdom, or imagination. But His Word. The creative Word of God. The Word that comes from God and the Word that speaks of God. This Word of God which in the beginning gave life, and now through the mouths of the apostles would give life still. New life. They are to take the words of the triune God and speak them to the world, pour them on the world, feed them to the world. They are to teach them what this word means - both what it teaches us about God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what He does for us; and what it teaches us about ourselves and what we are to do. And in this speaking there would be life. For from the beginning, that’s what God and His Word does. He is life and gives life. Life from nothing in the beginning, and life for those born dead in sin. Go and speak, Jesus says. This Word. This life giving Word. His Name. For where He is, where His Word is, where His Name is, there is life. And speak, Jesus

says, not as lords but as servants. Not dominating, but caring for all people. Speak, as God speaks.

Words matter.

So Peter and the eleven *speak*. They preach. And right after the words from Acts, their preaching, that we heard today, they would also baptize. Three thousand persons. They not only doing what Jesus told them to do, but Jesus fulfilling what He promised them He would do: give life through these words that they speak. And not just a little life. A lot of life.

For God's words do what they say in this way, too. Not only does God's *let there be* happen, but when God makes a promise, that happens, too. He promised a Saviour. He promised that this holy one would not see corruption in the grave. He promised that David's divine Lord would become David's human son, and then become David's Lord again as both God and man. And that one was the one they crucified - God using their evil plans and purposes for His own good. No, for *their* good. ***Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified***, Peter said. Promise fulfilled. When God says something, you can count on it. Even if it might happen in a way we do not expect, or could not ever imagine.

Words matter.

The words spoken today matter. The Athanasian Creed. Lots of words there. Words we maybe think don't matter so much; that maybe we could shorten that creed a bit, huh? But these are words carefully chosen; words bled and died for; words that we might speak the truth of who God is and what He has done for us. Because it matters.

It matters that God is Father. The Father. Not just a Father. I am a father. And I would still be if I were not a father. But Father is who God is. The Father of the Son. He was Father before He was Creator. Creation is what He did. Father is who He is. For if not Father, then no Son. And if no Son, no Saviour. No word going forth from God to give life; no Word going forth from God to save us from the death of sin. And the Spirit, too, true God. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, to take us to the Father through the Son. To give us God and bring us to God. To make us, too, not just creatures, not just a part of His creation, but children of the Father, in the Son.

This is who God is. And apart from this triune God, there is no God. He reveals Himself to us that we might know Him, believe in Him, and love Him. For you cannot love what you do not know. You fear a Creator, a King, a Sovereign; you love a Father.

Words matter.

This is the catholic faith, the creed said. Little c, meaning universal. This is the truth not just for some people but for all people. The truth that saves not just some people, but all people.

Words matter.

So we should look at our words. Are we speaking the word God has given us to speak, or another word? Our own words? Do you speak truth or falsehood, even if it's just a little white lie? Do your words build up or tear down? Do they comfort or make bitter? Do they honor or demean? Do they seek to make others think well or think badly of another? Do they corrupt or purify? Do they excuse or forgive? Do they confess or mislead? Or have you failed to speak when you should have? Your silence condoning error, declining the chance to love, or missing the opportunity to forgive. If you're like me, you have plenty to repent of here.

Words matter.

For we live in a world that seeks to silence God's Word. To silence the Word of God made flesh by His crucifixion, and to silence us. Just this week, in fact, the confession of Jesus by a nominee for government office tried to be silenced. If he wants this job, one senator said, he has to recant. Confessing this truth about Jesus, it was said, disqualified him for a job in the government of the United States of America. Maybe. It also brought death to eleven of the twelve apostles, and many more after them. And maybe it will to you, too. A job or life lost because you speak the Word of God.

But the life that God gives cannot be taken away by the world. Jesus rose from the dead and by His Word, so will you. His Word spoken on the Last Day, telling you to rise from the sleep of death, and you will. But also his Word spoken to you now. Because everywhere the Word of God sounds, it brings forth life. For the creating God is creating still. The speaking God is speaking still. The giving God is giving still. Giving Himself, and so giving life.

And so you are **baptized** and the Spirit gives you new life as you are born again, born from above, born sons and daughters of a heavenly Father. Your sins slay you and you hear the **Absolution** where the Spirit gives you life in the forgiveness of your sins, the forgiveness the Son won for you on the cross. You hunger and thirst for a better life, a righteous life. You eat the **Body** and drink the **Blood** of Jesus, and the Spirit satisfies your hunger and thirst, giving you what you need, strengthening you in faith toward God and love toward your neighbor. You hear the words of the world and maybe are swayed by them, but then you hear the **Gospel** where the Spirit gives you life as you hear the truth of God and all that He has done for you and is doing for you still. You receive confidence and faith to face another day of assaults and attacks from the evil one.

So do words matter?

What would Adam and Eve have done without the Word of God? Noah would have perished with the rest of creation without the Word of God. Abraham would have no promise to believe, Moses no word to speak to Pharaoh, no forgiveness to give the people of Israel after they had bowed down to a golden calf. There would have been no forgiveness for David after his sin, no prophecies to give the people of Israel hope, no promises of a Saviour. No angel Gabriel speaking the Word of God through which the Spirit conceives a Saviour. No John the Baptist, no apostles, no hope. We born dead in our trespasses and sins would die dead in our trespasses and sin. Which is what God told Adam and Eve *in the beginning*, saying: *the day you eat of that tree you will die dead*. That's the very literal translation of the Hebrew, which is not usually put into the English because it sounds funny, doesn't it? For how else can you die? Well, you can die dead, dead in your trespasses and sins and be lost forever; or you can die alive - alive in Christ and by His Spirit to live forever with Him. The first - to die dead - you do *apart* from the Word of God. The second - to die alive - you are *given* with the Word of God.

So do words matter?

The opening hymn today said it well. *Thy Strong Word* (LSB #578) created all things. *Thy Strong Word* came to live with us in the flesh. *Thy Strong Word* bespeaks us righteous. *Thy Strong Word* shined the wisdom and might of God from the cross. *Thy Strong Word* gives us lips and tongues, throats and mouths to speak Thy holy name. The Strong Word of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who speaks and it is so. The triune God who speak to you and for you, that you too may speak. To Him in prayer, and to others. To others, to confess who He is, to speak the truth, and to give His forgiveness. Because words matter, and those words matter most of all. Words that speak life. Words that speak God **for you**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.