

The Third Sunday after Epiphany
23 January, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 8:1-13
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

Talk is cheap, so they say. It's one thing to say you're going to do something. It's entirely another to actually follow through and bring results. We want proof. A husband who doesn't actually meet the needs of his wife, who doesn't actually sacrifice his wants and desires to provide for her temporal and eternal good, can say "I love you" all he wants, but he is a liar.

Words have become empty hollow things as we carelessly throw them around, paying no attention to what those words mean or the damage they can do in a matter of mere seconds. We are told that words can mean whatever we personally want them to mean, they can mean different things for different people. This is sheer foolishness of course because then words mean absolutely nothing and conversation is impossible. And because we are liars making promises we never intended to keep, promising results we know we can never deliver, words have become little more than meaningless shells. Politicians vow to uphold campaign promises only to be filled with excuses later why they failed. Husbands and wives vow to forsake all others only to later say they have fallen out of love or simply found something more exciting. Many catechumens make vows of faithfulness to all that they have been taught from the Scriptures, declaring before God and men that they would rather die than forsake the faith, only with the aid of their parents to never darken the doors of the Church again.

Repent. You have used words carelessly to harm your neighbor, your spouse, your friend, and your enemy. You have made promises with every intention of trying to find a way out later. You have spoken up on behalf of falsehood and remained silent in defense of the truth. You have sworn before God to change this or that about yourself if only He would

forgive you this time and then returned to your sin in the very next breath. We use the mouth given us to make endless and empty excuses as to why we don't pray or hear the Scriptures daily or help our neighbor or tithe or work hard at our job or go to church. But, rather than justifying us or proving to God why His commandments don't apply to us, our words only further expose the thief, the liar, the adulterer, and the idolater that lie within.

Heed the Word of God, therefore and repent. Don't make excuses. Don't add in conditions. Don't try to cut deals. Don't make more promises to God you can't keep. Just confess because there is One in your midst whose Word isn't cheap, whose Word removes your sin, whose Word takes away your death, who opens His mouth and declares you righteous. The Lord Jesus, the eternally-begotten Son of God, the Word that spoke into the darkness and called forth light and life from nothing proclaims to you in Word AND demonstrates by His cross and resurrection that God's will isn't to destroy you, to condemn you for your blasphemies, to hold you eternally accountable for your unfaithfulness to either Him or your neighbor. Jesus proclaims to you that the Father's will is to save you, to forgive you, to heal you.

Your vows to Him have fallen far short of the mark. But He has made vows upon you. God the Father has promised that the blood of His Son Jesus has made full payment for your unfaithfulness, your half-truths, and your outright lies. Even though not a hint of deceit was found in His mouth, the Lamb of God was condemned to death and the judgement of God's wrath because He assumed the guilt of your empty words so that the Word of peace and healing might be proclaimed to you. The Word made flesh wills and fervently desires that you be made clean, that you be forgiven.

And He provides for this Word to be proclaimed to you, not just once, but repeatedly so that in the midst of your doubt and fear you might be lifted up and sustained; so that as the father of lies himself, the lies of this broken and self-seeking world, and the lies of your own broken and self-seeking flesh try to steal you back from God's kingdom and rob you of

God's promises you might be refreshed and restored, assured again that God is no liar, that your sin will not be held against you, but by His Spirit changed. The Blood spilled on Good Friday was for you. God's will is for your salvation. Behind the word of absolution, behind the baptismal waters stand the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ, crucified on your behalf. His death and resurrection from the dead are the source of the promise that through Baptism, you have been saved, that Jesus' death and resurrection are your own. There you died to sin and there you were raised to new life in Christ. Behind the Words instituting the Lord's Supper lie the stripes, the thorns, the pierced hands, feet, and side of your Savior.

The talk of sinful man may be cheap and full of dishonesty. But God's Word is true and certainly anything but cheap. It is a Word fully guaranteed to you by Good Friday. God the Father has declared you to be His beloved child and it is so. He has purchased and won you from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. His Word is always faithful. It is powerful to do exactly what it says, as Naaman, as the leper, and as the centurion learned. Stand before the Lord this day and open your mouth wide, not to speak, but that Jesus may fill it with salvation, that He may cleanse you, heal you, and give you eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.