

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 1, 2017**  
*In Celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation*

**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**1 Peter 1:25**(NIV) ...The Word of the Lord endures forever.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, heirs of the Lutheran Reformation;

“If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times.” Have you ever used that phrase? Has anyone ever said that to you? Sometimes it seems our words go in one ear and out the other and no one remembers them. Does it ever seem like you are talking to a wall? Sometimes our words are not very effective, especially when talking to children and pets—and just maybe, sometimes talking to our spouse. Sometimes it seems as if our words have fallen on deaf ears. But at other times – it often seems at all the wrong times – our words are heard and remembered by EVERYONE. Unfortunately, our words can be very effective when we don’t want them to be, when we say something hurtful, or tell a lie or share a bit of gossip. Those kinds of words have an impact on those who hear them, and we can’t call them back. We can be very good at “using our words” in all the wrong ways.

When God uses his words, those words always have an impact. His words always, without fail, accomplish what he wills, what he intends. He called the universe into existence with his words. Unlike an artist who must have paint or canvas or stone and chisel to create, God creates with his Word. **God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.** (Genesis 1:3 NIV) He spoke and dry land appeared and the waters were gathered into the oceans. **God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.** (Genesis 1:11-12 NIV) He spoke and the sun, moon and stars appeared in space. Scripture tells us, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). His word called the creatures of the sea and the animals of the land to life. **God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." (21) So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind... And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. (25) God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds.** (Genesis 1:20-21, 24-25 NIV)

In the New Testament, Jesus spoke to the deaf man and his ears were opened. He spoke to a lame man and he got up and walked. He spoke to the raging winds and they became calm. Jesus cried out into the tomb of Lazarus, “Lazarus come out”, and the dead man came out.

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God compared his words to rain and snow as we heard in our Old Testament reading. The rain and snow fall and water the earth, just as God intends, and the crops grow. The rain and snow do what they are supposed to do. They do what God sends them to do. His Word is like that. It accomplishes the purpose for which God sends it. The word of God is powerful, effective and life giving!

Jesus, the Word, who was and is God, was sent by the Father to accomplish his purpose, to carry out his will. Jesus did exactly what he was sent here to do, to take our sins onto himself. Long ago, God told Adam and Eve, **“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”** (Genesis 2:17 NIV). That same word speaks to us in our sin, **“The wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23 NIV). All of our sins, all of those misspoken words, all of those intentionally hurtful words, every bit of gossip, every hurtful thought and action, the hate, envy and greed—every bit of it was borne in Jesus’ own body on the cross. For our sins, Jesus the Word made flesh suffered the penalty of death decreed by the Word of God. The Word accomplished all that the Father sent him to do. Then, according to God’s plan and purpose, on the third day after Jesus’ death, God raised his Son to life, exalting him and giving to him, the Word, all authority in heaven and on earth.

The Word of God still has authority. It still accomplishes what it is sent out to do. We now know the Gospel Word, the good news of Jesus. It is a living Word that creates faith by the power of the Spirit. The Gospel is a Word that brings life, just as surely as the rain and snow bring new life and growth to the plants and trees and crops. We have been born anew through the Word of God, born again of the water and the Word in Holy Baptism. Because of what Jesus has done for you, God with his Word declares you not guilty. God speaks through Scripture, through a pastor’s word of absolution, through the forgiving words of your brothers and sisters in Christ. God says for the sake of his Son that your sins are forgiven. What God says, happens. Your sins are forgiven, cast so far from God’s sight it is as though those sins have been lost forever in the depths of the ocean.

Five hundred years ago, a German monk named Martin Luther wrestled with this living and active Word. Luther wondered, “What does the written Word mean when it speaks of ‘the righteousness of God’?” Does it mean that he is the righteous God who punishes sinners, who sends to hell those who don’t measure up to his righteousness? In his struggle with the Word, Luther, guided by the Holy Spirit, came to understand that the righteousness of God, a right relationship with God, was a gift of God to unrighteous sinners. It was a gift of grace, God’s undeserved favor for sinners. The righteousness of God is a gift for all who believe in Jesus, a gift that is free for us because the price was paid in full by the Savior’s blood. It is a gift received by faith, by trust in the Word, trusting that God means what he says, and gives what he promises.

About 20 years before Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the Italian artist Michelangelo carved the *Pieta*, the beautiful marble statue of Mary holding the body of the dead Christ across her lap. In the hands of the brilliant young artist, the carved marble took on the appearance of living flesh, but when the finished statue was put on display, Michelangelo overheard a visitor give credit for his masterpiece to another artist! Rightly outraged, and unwilling to see his work attributed to someone else, Michelangelo took up his chisel again and carved the words in Latin, “Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florentine, made this,” onto the sash across Mary’s chest. It was the only work he ever signed.

Martin Luther certainly could have taken credit for the events of the Reformation. He struggled to find a merciful God as he wrestled with the language and grammar of Holy Scripture. His 95 theses against indulgences found a popular audience and got the angry attention of church leadership. The reformer’s writing, teaching and preaching spread the message of the Gospel across Europe. But Luther himself did not take credit for the events of the Reformation or for the rediscovered truth that we are justified only by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He did nothing, Luther said, the Word of God did everything. The Word did everything—in the events of the Reformation and in our salvation. As with Michelangelo’s statue, the words that rightly give credit—and all glory and honor—for our salvation might be engraved across each

new life in Christ: “The Son of God, the Word made flesh, made this!” We can trust the Word of God. We can trust that living Word that promises forgiveness and life to us through faith in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Words from our epistle reading today, from 1 Peter 1:25, became a motto of the Reformation. In Latin the phrase is *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternu* as you can see it spelled out on this clock. The initials of that motto, VDMA, were sewn onto clothing, flags and banners and etched into swords and even into the armor of war horses. In English the words are: “The Word of the Lord endures forever.” What is that word of the Lord? What is that eternally enduring Word, the Word from God that we can trust? The apostle Peter answers for us: “This word is the good news that was preached to you.” Amen.