

Michael J. Mathey
Pentecost XIX & Proper 24
October 19, 2025
Text: II Timothy 3:14 – 4:5
Title: Word Games

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. With all of the games being played in Washington over the past couple of weeks, there was one news story that you probably missed. In fact, even without the political games you probably wouldn't have paid all that much attention to this particular story, but thanks to the internet and sites like Facebook, I ran across an article reporting on something that happened over in England recently. A new Archbishop of Canterbury has been selected to oversee the 85 million members of the Anglican Church, also known as the Church of England. The new Archbishop's name? Sarah Mullally, the first female head of that particular church body.

Of course, many have celebrated this "historic selection" of the first woman to be the leader of the 1400 year old Anglican Church. They are thrilled by her pro-choice stance on the question of abortion, and her support of the so-called fight against climate change. They have celebrated and lauded her for her support of the Black Lives Matter organization and the LGBTQ agenda, and have conveniently ignored her refusal to clearly answer questions about how to protect children from sexual indoctrination. They have also not had any problem with her support of denying ordination to a man because he wouldn't agree that the Church of England was institutionally racist. But not all of those in the Anglican Church body have celebrated her appointment as the head of the church. It was announced on Thursday that a large and conservative group has declared their refusal to be subject to the Archbishop of Canterbury's authority any longer, and that they intend to assemble as an independent, global association of Anglicans based largely in African countries.

It's amazing that such a divisive person can be chosen to lead one of the largest Christian church bodies in the world, but today's epistle reading from the second letter to Timothy tells us that we shouldn't really be all that surprised. Chapter 4 verses 3 & 4 spells it out for us, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." There is no question that this time is here.

Few things will get you more ridicule in American society today than being sure of what you believe and letting people know it. No, today you must be tolerant of everybody and allow them to believe and teach whatever they want without question, and don't you dare contradict them or question them because who are *you* to judge!? Everything is open to personal interpretation, and nothing is objectively true, and that definitely includes what is in the Bible.

Many people today want you to think that the Bible is a tool that shows you how to get what you want out of God. He is there to give you everything that you could possibly imagine and make your life easier. All you have to do is ask Him in the right way or do the right thing or give the appropriate amount of money to the right group or the best preacher. Then God will see what you have done, and He will bless you beyond your wildest imagination.

If you doubt me, just look at the way that religious fads come and go. No wonder non-believers look at Christians and accuse us of being superstitious. So many of these fads come and go, and almost all of them say that they have the answer to living a God-pleasing, happy and content life. They make wild claims that everything will be perfect if you just do what they tell you to do and believe it enough. Once you do, then God will do what you tell Him to do. And underneath all of it is a teaching to ignore what the Bible really says, and to listen instead to the preacher that is throwing out false teachings in God's name.

It's so easy to follow a false teaching too. Satan does a really good job playing word games to make them sound good to our own itching ears, which is why he used them against Adam and Eve and still uses them with us. Who doesn't want to have a happy life and be blessed by God all the time? Who really wants to be responsible for confronting evil when you see it done? It's much easier and safer to follow society's taboo of not judging anyone's actions in any way, and whatever you do, don't speak out about something that you think is wrong because then you're being hateful and intolerant! And *that* can get you into real trouble in our world today, just look at what happened to Charlie Kirk.

But if you're following what God's Word truly says, then you can't avoid judging the actions of others. Just before he gives his warning about false doctrine, Paul tells Timothy that the Word of God is to be used "...for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." He calls us to use God's Word to correct others, to rebuke wrong doing and to teach all of us how to live as a Christian in this world. Paul isn't using a word game here. His charge to Timothy and to us is painfully clear, and we know very well how often we have failed in our job as a Christian.

We let sin and evil flourish around us with no attempt to stop it. We are cowards at our very core, and we end up committing sins of omission. That is, things that we know we should be doing but fail to do. It's the part of the Ten Commandments that we forget the most often. It's easy to remember what each commandment tells you not to do, and it's relatively easy to convince yourself that you've kept it. But what about the opposite of the "don't?" What about the "do?"

You shall not murder is pretty clear, but it also means that we are called to "...help and support our [neighbor] in every physical need." The seventh commandment tells us not to steal,

but it's also telling us to "help him to improve and protect his possessions and income."

Hopefully this sounds familiar to you because it's straight out of Luther's Small Catechism, and supported by the very Word of God that Paul is talking about.

The Word of God tells us all that we need to know about Him. He has given it to us for many reasons, some of which I have already pointed out from II Timothy, but there is more to what Paul is saying here. He writes, "...from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

These sacred writings that Paul is telling us about are the very Words of God given to us by God Himself, and they bring salvation through faith in Christ Jesus to each and every one of us. It is through the Word that we hear and learn that Jesus was a sacrifice on the cross for all of the sins of everyone, even you and me; even the sins of omission that I pointed out just a few minutes ago. Through His Word, the Holy Spirit comes to us to give and strengthen the very faith in Christ that saves us from eternal death in hell.

God has chosen to lower Himself to the point that He reveals Himself through something as ordinary and mundane as words. He has decided to do His work through them, and where you find His ordinary, sometimes even boring words, that is where you find Him. These things called "words" that we use to speak and that we play games with are used by God to deliver His grace to us. Words have meaning, and when they come from God's mouth they have a very special meaning for all of us. Words from His mouth deliver forgiveness through the Sacraments and the gifts that He has for us.

Through His Word, God gives us everything that we need to live the Christian life. Notice that God uses Paul to point that out too. This Word is meant to equip us to do the good works that He has given us to do, works such as we see listed in the bulletin that have been done by the LWML throughout our fallen world. Through His Word we can do the other half of each commandment, and the taint of sin doesn't matter because Christ has already done it perfectly for us and it is His good works that count for our salvation.

Do Christians play word games? It may seem like it to the unbeliever who accuses us of doing that, but through the Holy Spirit teaching us God's Law and His Gospel we know that's not the case. And make no mistake about this, God warns us to avoid false teachings, and that means that His Word can be taken in the wrong way in spite of what some people want to believe. Without care and faith, His Word will be taken in a way that will make you one of the dead when Christ Jesus comes to judge His kingdom once and for all. But to those who hold His Word sacred, who gladly hear and learn it and who use it with care, life everlasting will be given when He returns, just as His Word says that He will. As the last Word of Revelation says, "‘Surely, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.