

“Speaking The Truth Truthfully” Matthew 23:1-12

We speak. We speak a lot. We speak about things and people. We speak about things we know about and maybe things we don't know about. Words matter. Our words can touch a person. They can convey deep emotion . . . I love you, I hate you, I forgive you. Words are used to build up a person, to encourage, to give hope and inspiration; or they can be used to tear down, to hurt, to belittle, to convey hate, to destroy a person's heart and soul. And you know how that happens when we speak about others . . . accusing them of saying something they should not have said or something we don't like. And how the things I say are not the things I should say, and the things I want to say I don't say. Why does evil so easily come out of the mouth, and yet so rarely that which is good?

Now, long before we ever spoke a comforting word, a troubling word, or a dangerous word, the Lord God spoke. And when the Lord God speaks something happens. He used words to speak creation into being. The Word became flesh. The Holy Spirit call us by the Gospel, by the Good News, by words. Faith comes about through hearing God's Word, St. Paul says.

In church, we thus come to hear this Word of God – the Good News, the Gospel . . . words spoken and words heard. Words of forgiveness, words of promise, life, and salvation. Words of the love of God for poor miserable sinners. Words of old death and new life in Baptism. But when these life-giving words are not spoken and said as the life-giving words that they are, but are misused and mocked they do not bring life but death.

No, the Lord God does not like false teaching. He does not like people misusing His name and His Word. Don't misquote it. Don't dismiss it. Don't change it, add to it, or subtract from it. Instead, hear it, read, mark, learn, and meditate on it. But do not speculate about it. Don't question whether it is valid, important, true, or applicable to your life. The Lord, after all, doesn't like false teaching. The Commandments, and all of Holy Scripture, make that pretty clear.

And yet, even though the Lord God is quite clear on that, the mishandling of His name and His Word have always been a big problem.

Jesus knows how contagious false teaching can be. And that is what He is warning about in the Gospel Reading for today from St. Matthew, chapter 23. So we hear again: *"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So, you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.*

To be sure, these teachers of the Law and Pharisees that Jesus is speaking about read the Scriptures well enough. They were serious about not adding to or taking away from the Word of God in their teaching . . . or so they thought and claimed. But when they taught they would suck the Good News of all the Gospel promises right out of any and every part of it. They turned everything they read from the Old Testament into law only.

Now, that was all about 'them,' for Jesus then proceeds to address the disciples . . . and that means Jesus is also talking to 'you' as well. *"But you are not to be called*

Rabbi, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth Father, for you have a Father and He is in heaven.

We are to listen to and obey God. And anyone, no matter how great and wonderful he or she may be, or how gifted they are at teaching and public speaking; if they speak on behalf of God a word that differs from God's Word, then they are to be silenced because what they are really doing by their speaking is silencing God Himself. The moment one of these teachers or leaders departs from our heavenly Father's Word and falls into error he is going beyond his authority and place. No one in the church has authority to make us do anything that is out of harmony with the Word of our heavenly Father, for He alone is the one and only Father over us all.

What a hard reading, a difficult reading, and yet, what a necessary reading for November. For Jesus is coming to the end of His earthly ministry and so warns the people, the church, you and me about the Word of God . . . that there be faithful preaching and teaching, doctrine and life; that forgiveness and salvation and justification by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ be at the heart and center of that preached and taught Word. And the Church on earth is coming to an end too. False teaching is all around; it always has been and always will be.

For this was not just something going on during Jesus' time, or only during the time of the Reformation; but it is a constant problem for all times, including ours. There will always be false teachers sucking the good news of God's love, and continuous care, and promise, and salvation right out of His Word. And it will continue until the end

of time when Jesus comes back and puts a stop to it. The warning from Jesus is still valid for every teacher and every hearer.

And now you have heard the warning. Even more so, now you have again heard the true Word of Christ spoken truthfully. Thanks be to God for all the faithful who spoke and taught only the Word of our heavenly Father through which the Holy Spirit has called you to faith in Christ – the Word of forgiveness and salvation and life eternal.

We hear enough words these days about how everything is a mess and wrecked . . . the world is a mess, the environment is a mess, we're a mess.

That is what November brings to us . . . the end of warm weather, the end of the growing season, the end times, the end of the world. And we throw into that All Saints' Day . . . a day to remember those who died in the true faith, and who were not caught up with false teachers and their lies.

Thanks be to God for His Word of truth that even in the most desperate times and places we have a Saviour, His own dear Son. A Saviour who went to the cross in your place to pay for all your sins . . . even those sins of doubt and speculation and listening at times to those who speak falsely about His Word. Thanks be to God who has promised that His Word will endure forever; and through that holy Word keeps you in the one and true and only saving faith throughout your days of trial and trouble, protecting you and watching over you, and who has promised. Amen.