

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Do you keep your word? Is your word your bond? Is the person you are the person who speaks, that is, are you someone who believes your character is reflected in your speech? Most of us probably want to be people who follow through on what we say, who honor commitments, who don't tell lies or play fast and loose with our facts. Most of us would like to believe we are basically honest, not masters of spin who can't be pinned down because of our slippery language. Most of us don't construct our sentences so they are somewhere in-between true or false.

Talk is cheap and often seems to be on sale to the highest bidder. It's so easy to make a commitment, but follow-through isn't always a priority. Ever tell someone you're going to be somewhere or you'll do something just to get them off your back, knowing full well what you've said isn't at all a priority in your life?

Jesus tells us this morning to "Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." Did you catch that Jesus doesn't say the answer always has to be "yes" because you can answer "no." He doesn't say you have to be a people pleaser. Sometimes saying "no" is the best answer or the only way to honor a previous commitment. However, a "yes" means you need to follow suit.

Now this follows on some difficult preaching from Jesus where he takes the law regarding adultery and expands it to include simply looking at someone in lust. He has expanded murder, talking about anger and calling someone "you fool." In other words, thoughts and speech are included, these sins aren't limited to actions. All this means that those who defend themselves by their works and outward obedience to Jesus' commands suddenly find themselves feeling uncomfortable because the common ways we justify ourselves don't fool Jesus.

This is what Jesus condemns with Pharisees and teachers of the law, calling them hypocrites. They mastered the art of following the letter of the law, but didn't embrace the spirit or intent of the law, and held themselves as not needing to repent.

Then we have this business of taking an oath. Some folks would swear by Jerusalem or the by the earth, or heaven, but avoid swearing by God, if you made a promise by heaven well, you weren't really obligated to follow up on your promise because you didn't swear by God. This ties back in with let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no." There are of course circumstances where you must swear to tell the truth, uphold your promise, and you're doing so in a court of law. So there can be allowances made for those circumstances, however, they are exceptions.

But we should be people of our word, able to be relied upon. Others should know that we tell the truth, without tall tales, exaggerations, facts that simply aren't true, puffing ourselves up to look better or more important than we are, and telling stories in which we are the hero, promises we have no intention of fulfilling.

We should demand it of our leaders whether in government, the church, academics, business and everywhere else. It makes me wonder what would change in our society if people were committed to telling the truth. Anything less is really an offense against God because we are in God's image, and God is not a liar. God keeps his promises, and Jesus resisted and said "no" to temptation. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, knows those who hear his voice and follow him. He is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, and you and I saved by grace through faith can be certain of God's promise because it's rooted in Christ crucified, in his resurrection. God suited actions to word to his love for us, he died for us and rose again on the third day.

You and I as Lutheran Christians bear Jesus to the world, to our immediate neighbors and everyone else, we should be people of our word and our words and actions should align. Period.

AMEN