

Say the Word!

Pentecost 2

Luke 7:1-10

“Say the Word!” That’s what some of you may have been thinking shortly after we began our order of service this morning. We didn’t begin our Divine Service the way we begin every Divine Service on Sunday morning in which we receive the Lord’s Supper. We didn’t say the words. We didn’t speak our confession before God. We didn’t enter into the House of God and admit our unworthiness to be here and to be in his presence. We also didn’t hear *the Word*. That is, we didn’t hear the Word of forgiveness, the Word of absolution from the mouth of the Pastor as if from God himself. I appeal to your patience because I am going to continue to abstain from speaking that word of forgiveness a little while longer. I would like to pick up where we left off at the beginning of the service, though. I would like to pick up where we left off with those words of confession.

One of my professors at the Seminary told our class a story once about his first Call into the Pastoral Ministry. He served two parishes in Southern Oregon that were about eight miles apart. He mentioned that he would always drive the route and it would take about fifteen minutes or so. One time, though, he decided to walk it. It took longer but he saw more. He saw more beauty, for sure. But he was surprised by what else he saw more of. He saw more trash and garbage. He saw more vandalism and graffiti. It took longer but he saw more.

At this point I would like us to open up the *Lutheran Service Book* and turn to the *Small Catechism*. **(Read responsively with the congregation the questions in the *Small Catechism* titled “What sins should we confess?” and “Which are these?” on pg. 326 of *Lutheran Service Book*).** It takes longer but you see more. This is what Martin Luther calls us to do in the *Small Catechism*. He calls us to take a little longer to say the words. In particular, he calls us to take a little longer saying the words of our confession to God. He calls us to slow down and examine our unworthiness before our holy God.

So what do we see? Well, consider your station in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a husband? Have you cherished your wife? Are you caring for her as you ought? Are you taking the time to listen to her? Are you genuinely interested in her? Are you protecting her and defending her as a good husband should be doing for his bride? Are you a wife? Are you honoring your husband? Are you respecting him and letting him know that you appreciate him and how well he provides for you? Are you a father? Are you spending quality time with your children? Are you disciplining your children appropriately and protecting them? Are you modeling the Christian life for them and taking seriously your responsibility to teach the Christian faith in the home? Are you a mother? Are you letting your children know that they are loved? Are you listening to them? Are you a child? Are you honoring your mother and father that God has given to you? Are you trusting that they love you and have your best interest in mind? Are you obeying them? Are you a worker? Are you speaking well of your co-workers and your boss? Are you making good use of company time? It takes more time but you see more.

In our Gospel reading we learn about a servant of a Centurion, a Roman soldier. This servant of the Centurion is physically ill and in need of a healing. Because the Centurion cares deeply for his servant he sends for help. He has heard about Jesus. He has heard that Jesus has the authority to heal. So he sends men to seek out Jesus and gives them this message, “Say the Word!” He is a soldier who knows about authority. He knows that people in authority speak words that have power, words that accomplish things. This Centurion’s servant is waiting for a word of healing. “Say the Word!”

In the *Small Catechism* Martin Luther has us consider our unworthiness before God so that we can see clearly that we can see clearly that we are in a position similar to the servant of the Centurion. We are sick and in need of a Word of healing from Jesus. Martin Luther calls us to consider our stations in life and the responsibilities of those stations so that we can come to recognize our great need for Jesus' *Word of forgiveness* and come to trust more firmly in it. "Say the Word!"

I once heard a story about a man who was sick and in need of a healing but he didn't know how to be healed. This particular individual was incredibly disturbed and bothered by a few particular sins. He had sifted through the garbage and the trash in his life and he was horrified by what he saw. The guilt of his sin was overwhelming. And he carried it around with him day to day like a person with an open wound walking around without receiving any treatment. Although he had not been to a church since he was a little child, in a desperate attempt he decided to call a church in the area where his grandfather used to be a pastor. He spoke to the current pastor and requested a visit. After about fifteen to twenty minutes straight of this man sorting through the trash and the garbage of his sin with the pastor, the pastor then *said the Word*. He spoke God's clear Word of forgiveness in Christ. He assured the man that on account of what Jesus had done for him this man's sin was forgiven and gone. It is separated as far as the east is from the west. As the pastor spoke these words the man broke down and cried. He was hurting so badly and bearing so much guilt. This was the healing that this man needed. The clear words of the Gospel were the words he needed to hear.

This is why the Divine Service begins the way it does on Sunday morning with Confession. We have people that we are responsible to. We have wives to love and cherish, husbands to honor and respect, children to discipline and train up in the faith, and friends, co-workers, and neighbors to serve with words, actions, and deeds that build up and do not tear down. We have God's Will to carry out as he expresses it in the Ten Commandments. And the reality is that we often fall short of carrying out those responsibilities and living according to his Will. And like that man who was sick and in need of a Word of healing we can carry the guilt around with us day in and day out maybe not even realizing how much it affects us and how much it prevents us from loving and serving our family, friends, and neighbors. For their sake and our own we need that healing Word of God's forgiveness in Christ.

Christ has fully and completely carried out his Father's Word and Will for you through his death and resurrection. The night that Jesus was betrayed he spoke words of forgiveness, "Take and drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins" (Mt 26:28). At his crucifixion Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). And now his Word of forgiveness, life and salvation comes to you. It is a Word of authority that does what it says. It is a Word of healing that brings God's full forgiveness to you and separates you from your sin as far as the east is from the west. It is a Word for you to hear and believe and trust that you have exactly what it says.

God has sent me here in this time in this place to make certain that you have the blessed assurance of his forgiveness. He has sent me to "Say the Word!" Brothers and sisters in Christ, hear that Word now: "Upon this your confession I have good news for you. Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for you and has forgiven you all of your sins. As a Called and ordained servant of Christ and by his authority I therefore forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."