

Thy Strong Word

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
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*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever." Isaiah 40:8
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 complete, equipped for every
good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all
things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... John 14: 26*

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing
in your sight, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is our second week of our stewardship emphasis titled "Embracing Great
Commission Stewardship" The focus for today and this week is "Embracing a Commitment
to God's Word." One of our main texts of the day is from Isaiah 40, verse 8: "The grass
wITHERS, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever."

God's strong word will stand forever! God's strong word cleaves the darkness! Praise to
Thee Who light dost send!

Would you say that is a pretty forceful hymn? It sort of sounds like one of those ancient
hymns like "A Mighty Fortress" that came out of the Reformation. You may be surprised to
hear that it isn't as old as many of us who are in church at St. Mark today. It was written by a
man named Martin Franzmann, who also wrote a fine commentary on the epistle to the
Romans. Incidentally, if this message means something to you today, and you make a
commitment to study more of God's Word, you should avail yourself of a commentary or a
self-study Bible. I would strongly recommend that you consider getting a ESV Self-study
Bible.

The hymn "Thy Strong Word" is being sung or read in our services today and serves us
well because it highlights two things we are focusing on as we think about the stewardship
of the time God has given us. As we sing the hymn or read the words, it is pretty easy to see
its connection to God's Word, even in the title of the hymn. It also has, though not as
obvious, a connection to Lutheran schools. How? Well, the man who wrote the lyrics to this
hymn was a Lutheran school teacher and the motto of his Lutheran school, "Thy Strong
Word", is also the theme for the hymn.

Franzmann was also a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The motto of
Concordia St. Louis means "*Light From Above*". That motto was his inspiration for writing
"Thy Strong Word". Thy strong word did cleave (in other words, divide or split) the darkness!
Praise to Thee Who light does send! In six stanzas, this Lutheran school teacher summarized
Scripture and God's mighty acts. Please get out your hymnals now and turn to hymn number
578. (Lutheran Service Book)

Stanza one tells us about God calling his creation into existence with his strong word. Let's read the first four verses together. "*Thy strong word did cleave the darkness; At thy speaking it was done. For created light we thank Thee, While Thine ordered seasons run.*" Do you get the point? God spoke his creation into existence during the days of creation! There is power behind God's Word! God said, "Let there be light, and there was light!" God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear." And the dry land appeared! Here is another point: there was power behind the Word of God then, and there is power behind the Word of God today, for God is still speaking to us.

Let's read stanza two. "*Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness; Dark as night and deep as death, Broke the light of Thy salvation, Breathed Thine own life-breathing breath.*" Mankind fell into sin, and in doing so, brought a terrible darkness and death into the world. But God still cared for his creation and promised to send someone to save it. Note what it says in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

We read stanza three: "*Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess.*" Now Franzmann was a Lutheran Christian and believed what the Holy Scriptures say about what God does in baptism, and he believed what the ancient church taught. And that was that those who are baptized into Christ have "put on Christ, have received the Holy Spirit, and have received forgiveness of their sins." We believe that we are a new creation in baptism because of Jesus' righteousness, and GOD is the one who brings this about through his strong word.

Stanza four is about the most amazing statement in all of history. "It is finished!" Jesus said from the cross. Let's read it. "*From the cross Thy wisdom shining, Breaketh forth in conquering might; From the cross forever beameth, All thy bright redeeming light.*" The strong Word, delivered from the lips of Jesus Christ, brings light and salvation to all that believe it.

Until now, this hymn has been about all that God has done for us. But in the fifth stanza, we sing about the expected response to God's love for us. We read: "*Give us lips to sing thy glory, Tongues thy mercy to proclaim; Throats that shout the hope that fills us, Mouths to speak Thy holy name.*" Let me share this: In my opinion, there is no better thing that you can do for God than to tell someone about Jesus.

Now we come to stanza six. Please read one more time with me. We will read all eight lines. "*God the Father, light-creator, To Thee laud and honor be. To Thee, Light of Light begotten, Praise be sung eternally. Holy Spirit, light-revealer, Glory, glory be to Thee. Mortals, angels, now and ever, Praise the holy Trinity!*" So God has kept his promise to deliver us. How? He did it by the power of His Word. He has freed us from sin, death, and the devil, and we can look forward to life with God in a new creation.

Let's sum it all up. God has worked through the power of his Word to create, to bring light, to bring righteousness to bring new birth in baptism, to bring salvation, and to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil himself.

That's not even all that God's strong word does for us. Our Epistle reading for this day tells us that God's strong word makes us wise through faith in Jesus Christ. Then 2 Timothy 3:16 says this: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."

And God's use of his strong word is still going on. Jesus says so in our Gospel reading this morning. He said, "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

Do we need the guidance and strength of the Word as we live out our lives? You know that we do. Psalm 119:105 tells us so. It says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Now here is a harder question for me to ask. We have seen what God's Word can do. Who here has studied the Bible daily, every day in 2018? We are told that it is breathed out by God. Why don't we want to inhale this breath of God?

You know the answer. Even though we are holy saints of God, because we have received the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we are also poor miserable sinners. That's why we struggle to embrace this Word of God.

But if we ask for God's help, we can do this. We can embrace the Word on a daily basis. It will make a difference in your life. One of my Life With God participants wrote me a letter earlier this year, sharing the difference in her life since she started studying the Bible on a regular basis.

So, I encourage you on this second week of our stewardship emphasis, to make a commitment to an increased study of God's Word. This week in our service folder I have shared a number of ways in which this can be done. (See "Embracing A Commitment..." response form on page 4). I urge you to make a commitment in regard to this sometime in the next 24 hours, and put this commitment to God someplace in your home to remind you of that commitment. I believe that you will see the difference it can make in your life also. Amen.

Embracing A Commitment to God's Word

I hereby make a commitment to increase my study of God's Word by doing one or more of the following: (check one or more)

- Daily reading of God's Word
- Purchase a self-study Bible
- Start attending one of the 9:45 a.m. Bible studies
- Attend some of Pastor Mark's Bible studies
- Attend Pastor Ken's "Life With God" class
- Look into joining a current or small group Bible study
- Acquire Bible studies (or sermons) to be played in the car
- Do an in-depth study of a book of the Bible
- Other (list if you wish) _____