

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Muslims call Christians “the people of the book,” for we are word people. That’s especially so for Lutherans with their Reformation motto VDMA — *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*, from 1st Peter, “*The Word of the Lord endures forever.*” This motto expresses the Lutheran confidence in the enduring power and authority of God’s Word.

But even human words can be powerful. Oh, to be sure, when empty promises are made, you might hear someone complain, “*talk is cheap,*” but even that complaint is a testimony to the hurt caused by those false words. In fact, it’s easy to hurt someone by your words — even unintentional ones. Who here has not hurt someone by your words? Repent! Who here has not been hurt by words? “*Sticks and stones ...*”? Words do hurt, that jingle notwithstanding. Indeed, St. James speaks vividly about the tongue and its power. “*The tongue is a fire,*” he writes, and though such a small member, he reminds us, “*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*”

Words are powerful—from a simple, “*I love you*” to the revolutionary, *Give me liberty or give me death,*” to the justice-seeking, “*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’*”

And if these words are powerful, how much more powerful are the Divine words spoken by the Son of God Himself? Thus we see in our Gospel the people all astonished at Jesus’ teaching, for His teaching was not like the scribes—His words were with authority. His words displayed power.

Indeed, in our text, Jesus commanded the unclean spirit, “*Be silent,*” —and it was. “*Come out of him,*” He commanded—and it did. He rebuked the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law, and it left her. And elsewhere in Scripture, you hear this powerful Word say, “*Rise. Take up your bed and walk*” —and the lame man did. He rebuked the wind — and it was stilled. He said to Lazarus, dead for four days, “*come out*” —and he did. Jesus spoke with Divine authority and power, Trinitarian authority and power, as in the beginning when He spoke and “*it was so.*” “*All things were made through Him.*”

But what of His words today? Are they still words of authority and power? Yes, we Lutherans answer, for the Word of the Lord endures forever. This word of Jesus about Jesus today we call the Gospel, and it’s a performative word—it does what it says. It is the power of God to save us. Though we preach the Law still today — and you heard the stinging word, “*Repent*” today—the Law is not the Lord’s last word. The Law has no power to save. The law accuses; the law kills; it

plucks up and breaks down; it destroys and overthrows. But the law also draws us to God's ultimate word, the Gospel that builds and plants. The Gospel word is the power of God that that saves; the Gospel word is the power of God that creates faith and gives life. The Gospel word is that powerful word of God that says, "*In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace....*"

This is what pastors are given to preach—not our own word, but a word given us by the Lord's command to preach. It's what we're sent out with, for Scriptures says, it's by believing in this Gospel word that we are saved. It's by calling on the name of the Lord that we are saved. And we come to know this name by hearing the Lord's own words, Gospel words from the mouths of preachers (or at least we should); we believe it as the Holy Spirit in this word of Christ works faith in our hearts.

These words do still have power—they are performative: they're a power still to convert those who don't know Jesus, and to confirm those who have come to saving faith in Him. They're a power still to forgive sins — Jesus gave His church this power and authority; He sent His disciples out with forgiveness on their lips—and now pastors. "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*" And so we Lutherans confess, it's so. It's just "*as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.*"

We Lutherans confess that when we are baptized, that's the Triune God doing His thing: making disciples, making us His children, washing away sins, giving rebirth, creating faith, regenerating, renewing, saving, through the word attached to that water, a performative word: for "*without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism..., a life-giving water, rich in grace.*"

And as we come together today to this table, we come not just to eat bread and wine, but "*bread and wine included in, and connected with, God's Word,*" as Luther writes in the Large Catechism, and through that word God performs the miracle of the Sacramental Union: He joins Christ's body and blood to bread and wine, for us to eat and drink. God does it, through His word. Here is Luther again, "*It is the Word, I say, that makes and sets this Sacrament apart. So it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, Christ's body and blood For it is said, 'When the Word is joined to the element or natural substance, it becomes a Sacrament.'* This saying of St. Augustine is so properly and so well put that he has scarcely said anything better. The Word must make a Sacrament out of the element, or else it remains a mere element." God' performative word does it, not any merit or worthiness in us. And neither my unworthiness administering the

sacrament nor yours in receiving it can undo what God does in this Sacrament through His word: He joins the body and blood of Christ to bread and wine. Of course, our worthiness does affect the benefit received in this sacrament. And that means faith in these words: *“Given and shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of your sins..for the words ‘for you require all hearts to believe.’”*

The point is: amazing things can and are done by words — sometimes by human words, but these can be for good and for ill. But more amazing and wondrous is what God accomplishes through His words, astonishing words spoken by Jesus, authoritative and powerful words spoken by Jesus, words now given to His church to speak, words that have authority and power still and do wondrous things for us. The word of the Lord endures forever.

God grant you faith to believe the words spoken today—they’re from the “Book”: that you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, forgiven by His sacrifice on the cross, that you have been made His by the water and the word poured over you, and that you have life and salvation by the Body and Blood offered in this sacrament—given and shed for you. For these words are given you in all these ways that *“the word [may be] near you, in your mouth and in your heart,”* that *“you [may] confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead”* and so *“be saved.”* God grant it for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.