

March 25, 2015  
Isaiah 49:1-6

Midweek Lent 5  
One Little Word Can Fell Him

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.*

Those born and bred in the heart of Dixie have a vocabulary all their own. It's not "man," but "may-on." It's not a "thing," but a "thang." It's never a "fire," but a "far." You'll never hear anyone talk about going to a "dance," they always go to a "day-ins." And a big business way down South isn't "oil business," it's "awl-beniss." But if you weren't raised down South, all you need to say is one word and a true Southerner will say, "Ya'll ain't from 'round here, are ya?"

This last weekend I was informed that it's not the North Dakota State "Bison", but the North Dakota State "Bizon." Even when you are from some place, you have the way you say things. For instance if you aren't from my home town, you'll call it "Anti-go", where us that were born and raised call it "Anigo".

You see it can only take one word. It's true if you're a Yankee in Dixie or you could be a Midwesterner and you move to a different state; it's even more true if you're the Lord's Servant. In our text the Servant says, "He made My mouth like a sharp sword."

A "mouth like a sharp sword" is one that is similar to the mouth of the coming Davidic deliverer, described as the one who will "*strike the earth with a rod of His mouth*" (Isaiah 11:4). Unlike the Persian King Cyrus, who waged war against Babylon "according to the flesh," the Servant will employ *weapons "not of the flesh but that have the power to destroy strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). In a world in which the rise and fall of nations appears to be determined not by prophetic pronouncements but by imperial armies, this may seem like a feeble piece of equipment.

But in Isaiah 40-55, the power of God's Word is highlighted. Isaiah 40:8 says, "*Grass withers, flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.*" Isaiah 55:10-11 states, "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and shout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*" And from Isaiah's third Servant Son: "*The Sovereign Lord has given Me an instructed tongue, to know the Word that Sustains the Weary*" (50:4).

When God speaks, things happen. It only takes a word. For example, a road sign says "Stop" and we stop. A parent may look at a dirty room and say, "Clean," and we clean—quickly! A bill says "Due," and if we have the money, we pay now. In these instances, it only takes one word!

Writing in the eighth century BC, Isaiah presents the Servant to those Israelites who were exiled in Babylon in the sixth century BC. Their temple had been burned and

demolished. Their King Zedekiah had his eyes gouged out at Riblah after witnessing the butchering of his sons. Judah's entire way of living had come to a brutal end by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and his captain Nebuzaradan. The exiles only knew defeat. Their liturgy is summarized in these words from Isaiah 40:27: *"My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God."*

If you've ever been divorced by a spouse or abandoned by a parent, you've echoed these words. If you've ever been hurt so badly you couldn't reach down deep enough inside to express the pain, you've lived this nightmare. If you've ever fought horrifying demons from your past, you know this chaos.

Overcome by life in Babylon, the exiles turned to the fleeting, the temporary, the quick fixes. They were so Bold as to say in Isaiah 56:12: *"Come, let me get wine! Let us drink to our fill of beer!"* In the agony of defeat, so often you and I get sucked into what is shallow, superficial, cheap, and dirty. Looking for quick revenge, spouses get tangled up in one-night stands. Students take shortcuts and then they are caught cheating. Parents neglect their children to pour everything into their own careers. The result? We find ourselves in the despair of exile: *"My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God."*

Enter Yahweh's Servant, who says in our text, *"He made My mouth like a sharp sword."* Just one word will set right what is so wrong with our lives. To quote from the Ethiopian eunuch who speaks to Philip about this same Servant, *"Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip told him the good news about Jesus* (Acts 8:34-35). Jesus is the Servant in our text who needs only one word to accomplish His Father's mission and bring order to a fallen and shattered world.

Anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism, Jesus is thrust into the wilderness to meet the enemy. He goes to Battle with a thunderous *gegraptai*, which, although one word in Greek, means "It is written" in English. To "Bruised reeds and smoldering wicks" like the man with leprosy, His word was *katharistheti*, which is again, just one word in Greek; we translate it, "Be clean." He rebuked the chaotic wind and the waves with *Siopa*, "Be quiet." To the deaf and dumb man He cried out, *Ephatha*, "Be opened." Luther put it this way: "Ein Wortlein kann ihn fallen" or "One little word can fell him!" The centurion in Matthew 8:8 gets it right when he says to Jesus, *"But just say the word, and my Servant will be healed."*

Climactically, Jesus would marshal just one word. Isaiah's third Servant Song sets the stages: *"I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting"* (Isaiah 50:6). Arrested, bound, tried, slapped, beaten, stripped, scourged, abandoned, spiked, forsaken—He uttered one more word, *tetelestai*, in English, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

All that the Old Testament had foreshadowed, foretold, predicted, prefigured, and promised is now complete, done, finished. The serpent is crushed, the Lamb is slain, the atonement is made, the Passover is complete, and the banquet is ready. From the

cross, He speaks one-word descriptions over us—forgiven, washed, cleansed, justified, loved!

Meaning what? Meaning He still speaks order into Chaos! Hebrews 4:12 puts it this way: *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword.”* His Word, connected with water, bread, and wine—placed upon our foreheads and into our mouths—delivers restoration, healing, and forgiveness. We are bought in the blood, sealed with the Sacraments, and abounding in hope and joy!

But the final restoration is yet to come. At His second coming, the Servant will return as a rider on a white horse. His name will be called Faithful and True and King of kings and Lord of lords. On that day the ultimate one-word victory will be uttered and we will finally come home. John records it in Revelation 21:6, *gegonan*,--“It is done!”

To the student who holds defeated dreams, He speaks. To the couple with a barren womb and fervent prayers, He speaks. To the Christian who daily fights with his flesh only to lose time after time, He speaks. To any person who has felt the sting of death, the power of the law, or the torment of guilt, He speaks.

And so we say back to Him, “Lord, just say the Word, and we will be healed.”

In Jesus name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*