

Beloved in the Lord: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning we'll especially consider these words from 1 Kings 19: "And when Elijah heard [the sound of the whisper], he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave."

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

*Congregation is seated*

Just words. It's just words, empty talk. There's not much to them. It can be so easy for us to think this in our cynical culture.

Just words. That's probably what the wife of the absentee husband thinks when she hears her husband say that he's going to be home early tonight. It's just words. That's what the kids of the mom who's habitually late think when their mom promises she'll be on time to pick them up tonight. Just words. It's what the parents of the never-home son think when he says he's going to try and make it home for Thanksgiving this year. It's just words.

It's things like this that cause us to think that words can be pretty cheap. It's because we fail to keep our word that so often we people don't trust what's said. We want to see what actually happens. We'll believe it when we see it we think.

It seems like words are easy. That words are cheap. It's seems like actions are what really matter. It's along these lines that the Apostle John exhorts us to love not just in word or talk, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). We do need this exhortation because too often we don't keep our word. Too often we say we're going to do one thing, but we end up doing something else instead. Too often we make promises that we won't keep. We speak too quickly without forethought and so end up saying something we don't actually mean.

But it's just words we think. We try to justify ourselves thinking, it's not like I actually did something all that bad. I didn't steal something or hurt my neighbor, at least physically. That would be serious. But if it's just a little something I said or a little white lie, it's not that big of a deal. After all, it's just words.

Well, in today's reading the Lord comes to Elijah in a way that should change how we consider words. Today, our Lord comes to Elijah in 1 Kings 19 with Just Words – the sound of a whisper. That's really amazing considering what's going on with Elijah. Elijah is downtrodden and afraid. He's terrified because Queen Jezebel had given her word that she would kill Elijah. And this was a woman who had been viciously attacking the prophets of the Lord. As a result, Elijah despairs and actually asks the Lord to take his life when he was in the wilderness. The Lord instead strengthens Elijah with food and water for his journey through the wilderness to Mt. Horeb. Still Elijah is dejected because of the threat on his life and because he feels all alone when he comes to Horeb, the mountain of the Lord.

It is here, in this moment of weakness for Elijah, that the Lord comes to him with something more lasting than a meal. And the Lord comes to comfort Elijah not with an impressive show of power – in a strong wind, or in an earthquake, or in a fire – but with the sound of a whisper. The Lord comes with Just Words to soothe and to still the prophet's heavy heart. The Lord comes to give His promise to Elijah that he is not alone – 7,000 in Israel have not kissed the idol Baal and will not bow down to him.

Just Words. That's the way that the Lord comes to Elijah to give him real comfort and peace.

And the Lord comes to you in the same way today.

While we are tempted, according to our sin, to think that this way of Just Words isn't all that weighty. After all, we've been told lots of things that didn't

actually end up coming true or working out like we had hoped. While we're tempted to think that not much is happening when it's Just Words, we should acknowledge that the Word of the Lord is different.

We can see this in the creation of the world. Because when God said, "Let there be light," there was light. He didn't need lightbulbs and wiring and electricity. Things that we were worried about here at St. John's this last week. God doesn't need those things. He doesn't need the switch to work when you flip it. He just says it and it happens. He says "light" and light appears. You see, His Word brings about the thing it says.

And so, when God gives you His Word, that's something different. He actually delivers. And He always delivers. His word is true, and powerful, and dependable. He shows this in the creation. And He proves it again through Jesus His Son.

For God had promised that the Offspring of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent. God had said that the Son of David would establish His Kingdom forever. God promised that His Servant would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Jesus said that He would be "delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day" (Matthew 17:22-23).

And those things happened just as God had said. The Son of God came into this world to be born of woman, to be born under law in order to redeem us who are under the law. He did just that as He took our sins upon Himself at the cross. And when His cross was driven into Golgotha, the place of the skull, the head of the serpent was crushed and satisfaction was made for our sins. And on the third day, the resurrected and eternal reign of Jesus was established.

Now, some might say, "How can you say the eternal reign of Jesus has begun? Look at what's going on in the world around us. There are wars and rumors

of war. There are diseases developing at what seems to be a faster pace than ever. There's turmoil and conflict in our society. Some of the most basic and fundamental truths are rejected by people all around us. Common decency isn't all that common."

Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, this is why we need Just Words. This is why we need the Word of the Lord to comfort and soothe us. Because this sinful and fallen world can be quite messy. In the midst of this all the Lord wants you to cling to His Word.

You see, His Word is the thing on which you can actually depend on in the middle of the mess around you.

And you need to depend upon it. Not just because Jesus offers promises like, "Take heart; I have overcome the world," and "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

You, and I, need to depend on the Word of God because it is a Just Word – that is a Word that makes holy, which is what you and I need. For while the symptoms we see in the world around us might look different than what we see when we look in the mirror, the sickness is the same. The sin out there, is within us as well. And so we need a Just Word from the Lord.

Fellow redeemed; this word is yours. The Lord has come to you with the sound of His Word to say, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And it is so. Your sin is gone. Removed from you as far as the east is from the west. You can be certain of this, not because you worked to pay off the debt, but because Jesus declared "Tetelestai." "It is finished." "Paid in Full."

Because of Jesus. Because of His life, death, and resurrection. Because of Jesus' Word you can confide. Whether it's me delivering the Absolution or Vicar delivering a sermon. God's Word does the work. It's the Just Word that makes holy.

In a couple of minutes, we're going to hear the Word of God in the rite of Vicar's Installation. This isn't the Word that makes Vicar holy. That Word was spoken over Vicar when he was baptized "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

So, Vicar doesn't become any more holy today than the rest of you, for you've been made holy in your baptism. What happens for Vicar today is that he takes up the charge that the Lord has given to him to be one who shares the Word of the Lord with us here at St. John's. Today, we thank God for sending His worker among us.

We pray that the Lord will make Vicar faithful to His Word and as he serves among us for this year to come. And we pray that the Lord will continue to help us receive God's Word in faith. Because unlike it can be with us, God's Word is never cheap. It's not a light thing or empty talk. It always does what it says. And you can know this for certain because it was paid for with Jesus' holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. That's what makes it a Just Word. That is a Word that makes us holy before the Lord for Jesus' sake and in Jesus' Name. Amen.

*Congregation stands*

Now the peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.