

Saints of St. John's, visitors, students, staff, and families of our TLS association, brothers and sisters from Christ and Faith:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The thoughts for the message this day come from our reading in Proverbs 4, especially these words: "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. ²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

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

When I was a student at a Lutheran School in Minnesota, the old adage was often said that "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." That's been a way that people have responded to verbal insults for hundreds of years. Maybe not so much nowadays, because quite honestly, it's a pretty bad saying. Words can hurt.

Words matter. Sometimes we act as if they don't because they're not something you can see or touch, but words do matter. We know they do. We know how they can impact us. There are the words which we can't get out of our minds. The criticisms and critiques that others have spoken to us. Those we remember. More than the compliments and the words of appreciation and affirmation.

And then there are the words we've spoken that we wish we could take back. The words spoken in haste, in a moment of frustration, stress, or anger. We have those words which escaped our mouths, but which we wish hadn't. We wish those words wouldn't have tarnished our reputation or harmed that relationship. Words matter.

If it's true that the words that we say matter, then how much more do the words we live by matter. This is what our reading from Proverbs 4 is all about. Actually, it's what all of Proverbs is about. At least 15 times in the book of Proverbs, the son is encouraged to listen to

his father's teaching. At the beginning of the book, Solomon writes, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction" (1:8). Later he says, "My son, do not forget my teaching" (3:1). In our reading for this morning we hear it: "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many" (4:10) and "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings" (4:20).

Solomon, who was wiser than anybody else in the world. Solomon, who had lived a full life and lost sight of God in his abundance, and later was restored to a faithful life. Solomon was fixated on this in the book of Proverbs, that his son would learn from his teaching, which is the way of wisdom.

And so, Solomon orders his life around teaching his son. He writes this book to his son. And this is what makes Proverbs such a great book for young people – that as they grow – they might hear the Word and walk in the way of wisdom. How appropriate than that this is the appointed reading for this day when we have TLS Sunday going on!

However, while Proverbs is a great book, often times people miss all that is going on with the book. Proverbs offers really good advice for Christians, especially young Christians. The book is filled with practical advice. Like, "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent." And, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." While Proverbs offers this great practical advice, there is an even more important word that is offered in Proverbs and that is the Word of life.

You see, that's how much words matter, they can actually bring life. What great news for us! For us people who have debts and sins. For us who have doubts and regrets. It's good news to know that a word can bring life.

We can appreciate this when we think of how a word of welcome or forgiveness was just what we needed to hear after we had sinned in one of our relationships. We said or did something, and we had to go talk to somebody. But we were anxious to do it because we were in the wrong. We had crossed the line. How would we be received?

If you've ever been in that situation, you might know how great it feels to get a word of welcome or forgiveness in that moment. It really is life-giving. It takes the weight off of our shoulders. It refreshes our souls. A word can bring life.

This is especially true of Jesus' Word. Jesus shows this in Mark 2. That's when a paralyzed man was lowered through the roof where Jesus was teaching. Remember that Jesus first forgave the paralyzed man his sins. But that threw some in the crowd into a frenzy. "[This man] is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" they thought. The religious leaders were all fired up about Jesus' Word, but for the wrong reason. They just thought Jesus was blowing smoke. That His Word didn't amount to much.

So, Jesus went ahead and healed the paralyzed man. But before He did, Jesus said this, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." – Jesus [then] said to the paralytic – "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And when the man got up, the healing was the proof that Jesus' first Word mattered. That when Jesus said "Your sins are forgiven" it was really done.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, that's what happened for you this morning. You came to church carrying your bag full of sins. The wrongs that you had committed this week. The words you spoke against your neighbor. That you used the tongue the Lord gave you for that instead of for prayer and praise. Those sins were in your bag. And the thoughts you had against your boss, or your teacher, or your parents – not living under their authority well but thinking that you know better. Those sins were in your bag that you had to carry to church. Along with all the wrong things you did and all the good things you failed to do. All of that was dragging you down as you carried it to church this morning.

But the Word of God matters for you. When you confessed those sins, God heard your confession, and He sent me to say to you this morning. "By the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." And poof, they were gone. Your bag was empty because of Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection. Your sins are forgiven, because you were given the Word of life.

What a great thing! No wonder, that Solomon writes, "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh."

God's Word brings healing and life. That's why we do what we do here at St. John's. That's why we gather around the Word every Sunday. That's why we have readings from the

Scriptures and why God's Word forms our liturgy. It's why we gather on Wednesday evenings for Sound Words Academy. It's because God's Word brings life.

And it's why we here at St. John's and our sister congregations of Christ and Faith are a part of Topeka Lutheran School. It's because words matter. It's because God's Word gives wisdom, and it gives life. This is what we need. And it's what we need to pass on to our children, to the next generation. And this means that our lives should be ordered around this Word of life, hearing it, living in it through our baptism into Christ, and passing it on.

In Proverbs 4, not just the section we heard this morning, but in the larger chapter, Solomon includes 10 parts of the body when it comes to receiving the Word of life. We heard some of those in our reading, like the ear and the heart. There are others in the rest of the chapter, like the eyes and the feet. The reason why Solomon lists these 10 parts of the body is that 10 is a complete number. Look at your hands. 10 shows completion.

Solomon's point is this. The whole of one's life is to be ordered around the Word, because words matter. So, order your days and life around the Word. Go to church on Sundays and participate in the Wednesday programs. And help out or volunteer at TLS, where God's Word fills every school day. And have God's Word fill your home as you pray in the morning and at night and before meals. And as you do devotions and bible readings. And speak God's Word to others in your daily lives.

Do all that you can so that God's Word fills all of your days. Because this Word is a way of life. Yes, it's a way to live by, but it's also a Word that brings life to you, and to those you share it with. So, God help us to order our churches, our school, and our lives according to His Word. Amen.

Congregation stands

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