

Only the Deaf Can Hear These Words

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16b) August 26, 2018

Isaiah 29:11-19

¹¹ And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." ¹² And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read." ¹³ And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, ¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden." ¹⁵ Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" ¹⁶ You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? ¹⁷ Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? ¹⁸ **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.** ¹⁹ **The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.**

In the Name of Jesus.

Jesus creates what was not before there. He speaks a word, and what did not exist, now exists. His word, more than just describing a fact or a truth, more than just teaching a history lesson or a moral lesson, creates a new thing.

Which is not the way we normally think of words. We think of words as describing, as keeping record, as teaching what's right, as setting up boundaries; we think of words not as creating something new, but as keeping record and control of what already is.

So, we keep our records, write our histories, and set down our rules so that everything is kept under control.

That's the way the Pharisees treated words. By words, from one generation to the next is passed on the

rules for how to live a worthy life, or a clean life, or an efficient life. But when Jesus speaks a word, he is doing something different. He is creating. He is bestowing life, upholding life, extolling life.

Which means, it's easy to get Jesus wrong. Because, we think he's going to use words the way we use words; so, when we hear him, we think we're going to hear more words about how we are supposed to live, instead of hearing a voice creating a new thing.

Just think of someone who says they are Christian, yet stays away from the Lord's Service, and think of asking them, Why?

We can guess the answer. Something like, *"Well, I am Christian, but I just don't need to keep hearing those same old stories over and over. I already know them. How many times do you need to hear about Noah and the flood before you get it? Or Abraham and Isaac, or David and Bathsheba, or Peter falling into the water, or all the rest?"*

So, the one who thinks himself a Christian stays away from the Lord's service because he already knows it. Kind of like Algebra class, where we learned it back in high school, so we need not show up again. Then, the Word Jesus speaks in his service is treated like a body of knowledge, like a history book or Algebra class, and once you know it, you know it.

In this way, we reduce our Lord's Word to being a word of man, just like all the other words in our history books or math or science or whatever, and, if that's the case, coming to the Lord's Service really is redundant, unnecessary.

That's the way the Pharisees treated the Lord's Word. It was a passing on of knowledge. It was a book of how to live better, of rules and procedures. It was a doctrine to show how to control your life and the lives of others so that things worked better. Mark 7:6:

And [Jesus] said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

There was once a little boy who, every week or so, would walk down the sidewalk by a tall fence which he was too short to see over. And as he walked down this particular block, he would hear coming from the other side of the fence terrible screaming. The screaming would get loud and intense, then, it would quite down, then it would get loud and intense again, then quite down, on and on.

He didn't know what was on the other side of the fence. But he knew he didn't want to be there.

He continued walking by this fence every week or so for some years, till he figured he could take it no more, and he stayed away.

Several years later, he walks by again. He starts hearing the loud screams. He's now taller, and as he hears the screams and can now look over the fence, he sees the most amazing sight. He sees the tallest roller coaster ever. As the twenty or so people start their descent at 90 miles an hour, it's nothing but screams. Then the roller coaster starts the ascent, and the screaming goes down. Then it hits the top of the incline, and the screaming starts again. On and on.

And the now grown boy realizes he's lived his whole life having robbed himself of the best fun ever—because he misread the screams. He heard them—but he was deaf to what the screams were actually saying.

The Lord Jesus with his Word creates a new thing. By his word, what before did not exist, now exists.

If we come to the Lord's Service thinking that Jesus is speaking a word to simply describe a fact or a truth, or teach a lesson of history or a morality tale, then we're like that boy walking past the screams thinking they are terrible.

It's a matter of Law and Gospel.

We come to the Lord's Service and we hear the Lord having his Word proclaimed among his people. As we hear our Lord in his Word teaching history lessons or fables of morality, or better ways to live, or how to change our lives, then we are hearing him as the voice of Law. And if we're hearing him for his Law, then we might as well be like the one who says, *I don't need to go to church on Sunday, I already*

learned those lessons back in Sunday School.

For our Lord came for the Gospel. We already had the Law. It's written on our hearts. He didn't need to come for that. He came for the Gospel.

When he gathers those who belong to him to his Name, he is coming to serve with his gifts. He is there in the midst of his people to proclaim his Father's Name and to cleanse of all sin. He is there not to control and kill, but to bestow gifts and create life.

When we hear his Word as his voice of Gospel, we are like the boy finally hearing the screams of the roller coaster and knowing: this is pure delight!

Yet, we *can't* hear his Word for its gift. Not on our own. We can't hear his voice for life. For we are deaf. That's what it means to be a sinner—it means to hear God's voice, but to hear it not for gifts, but for accusation, not for life, but for death.

And a deaf man cannot make himself hear.

So, Jesus, by his Word, creates what was not there before. He speaks his Word and it is a living Word bestowing life. Spoken into ears deaf to his Gospel, his Word creates ears to hear. Spoken to consciences cemented in guilt, his Word cleanses and creates new hearts of faith. Spoken to sinners hardened by the accusation, his Word forgives sin and sets us free in joy. Isaiah 29:18:

¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. ¹⁹ The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

Hear the Word of the Lord. He is creating a new thing.

He speaks you forgiven of all sin. He declares you clean before his Father. He removes the verdict for your past sins. He forgives your sins of today and tomorrow, for he does not desire to quit being your Savior. He creates in you a new heart of faith, a cleansed conscience holding on to his word of grace.

He creates you anew every day, daily putting to death with his Law your Old Adam of sin, and daily raising you up to life in your new Adam, your life of faith and joy.

Hear his voice not to cause the screaming of the fear of death, but to create the screaming of delight.

For he is as the Groom who so loves his bride that he each day sanctifies her, cleansing her with the washing of water and the Word, presenting her without spot or blemish.

And you, being daily created anew by his Word, or of his bride, the Church.

In the Name of Jesus.