

The gospel lesson for tonight occurs in Luke right after the story of the temptation of Jesus. In that story, when Satan tempts him to change stones into loaves of bread, Jesus refutes the devil by quoting tonight's Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy chapter 8. Jesus says: "One does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

After being tempted by the devil in Luke's gospel, Jesus goes to Nazareth to the synagogue where out of his mouth he read from Isaiah chapter 61. With the words of his mouth Jesus identifies his mission: he was sent to preach, proclaim, and announce. Jesus says: "The Lord God has anointed me to *preach* good news to the poor, *proclaim* release to the captives, and *announce* the year of the Lord's favor."

Different people responded differently to what Jesus had to say to them. Last night, at Bible Study, we heard what happens to Jesus immediately after verse 22, which is where our gospel lesson ends tonight. Jesus keeps talking, and the people of Nazareth get very upset with him, so upset, in fact, that they try to throw him off a cliff. They hated the things that he had to say to them. But other people in other places responded differently to what come out of Jesus's mouth. Some people loved listening to what Jesus had to say, so much so that they left homes, families, and friends to follow him wherever he went. Whether people hated him or loved him, the mouth of Christ was and still is important to us and to the entire world, because the words that come out of the mouth of Christ are words of justice, righteousness, grace, truth, and love.

The Mouth of Christ says all sorts of things. Tonight, we look at and listen to the words that Jesus said in his preaching and teaching as he talked with people.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; those who follow me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." "Let the little children come to me and don't stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

"I am the bread of life; those who come to me shall not hunger, and those who believe in me shall never thirst." "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; those who eat of this bread will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

When Jesus spoke to the paralytic, he said, "Your sins are forgiven; get up and walk."

Jesus spoke to a storm, "Peace, be still." And the wind and waves stopped and there was a great calm.

“I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Two Wednesdays ago, to the woman who was a sinner who washed his feet, Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!”

Jesus said, “If anybody is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. All who believe in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of their hearts shall flow rivers of living water.”

At the funeral procession for the only son of a widow at Nain, Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you arise.” And then what happened? Do you remember? The dead man sat up, and he began to speak with his *own* mouth. And then fear seized everyone in the funeral procession, and they glorified God by *speaking* themselves, saying “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favorably on his people!” And the speaking continued. This word about Jesus spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Another time, Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” “I am the resurrection and the life; those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die forever.”

In our gospel story that we’ll hear in a couple of weeks, on Sunday, March 9, we’ll find Jesus standing outside the tomb of Lazarus, and he’ll cry out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” And even though he had been dead for four days, and his hands and feet were bound with bandages, and his face was covered with a cloth, even though Lazarus was dead, he came out. What Jesus said with his mouth made Lazarus alive.

At the last supper with his disciples, Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places; if that’s not so, why would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?”

Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”

All of these gracious words that come from the mouth of Christ truly show us and truly show the world that one does not live by bread alone or by paycheck alone or by family and friends alone. We live and are alive by every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord. These words that Jesus speaks, they are words that can sink their teeth into you, and they can stick to the ribs of your mind.

The words of Jesus preach, proclaim, and announce to us continually that God loves us, that we are

unique and special to God. These words proclaim that the talents and abilities that God has given us are worthwhile, that we can love others because God has first loves us.

The words of the mouth of Christ are not empty words. They are not expressions of love in word or speech only. They are words that reveal a love that is expressed in action, in deed, and in truth. These words of love from the mouth of Christ ultimately compelled Jesus to carry his cross to his own crucifixion. And although the feet of Christ and the hands of Christ were nailed to the cross, incapacitating those parts of the body of Christ which we've looked at the past two weeks, the mouth of Christ continued to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God from the cross. Although he was in agony, the mouth of Christ spoke lovingly from the cross.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." To the thief crucified beside him, he said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Lovingly providing for the needs of his mother at the time of his death, Jesus spoke from the cross and said to Mary, "Woman, here is your son," as he was referring to the disciple whom he loved, who was standing next to Mary. And to this disciple, Jesus said, "Here is your mother." And from that hour on, the disciple took Mary into his own home and cared for her.

As Jesus felt the pain of separation from God cause by *our* sin as he hung on the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When Jesus knew that all was now finished, in order to fulfill scripture, he spoke, "I am thirsty."

Then completing his mission, he said, "It is finished." And finally showing us and telling us not only how to live but also how to die, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And he died.

Yet we rejoice, for the mouth of Christ was not silenced forever by death. He was resurrected, and he lives! At the resurrection the words from his mouth were these: "Do not be afraid; go and tell my disciples to go to Galilee, and they will see me there." At several appearances after his resurrection, the first words from his mouth were: "Peace be with you." The mouth of Christ still brings us peace. From Matthew's gospel, the final promise from his mouth brings peace to all of our troubles and all of our days, and he says: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The mouth of Christ is with us, and we are to be the mouth of Christ to others by preaching, proclaiming, and speaking to them what the Lord has first spoken to us: love, life, and forgiveness. Now you are to speak what has been spoken to you by the Mouth of Christ. Go and speak. Amen