

**10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost August 17 2025**  
**Jeremiah 23:23-29; Luke 12:49-56**

How do we tell who speaks for God, whose words are a fair representation of the divine word? How do we know what the true Word of God is? Which of these religious people is telling the truth? In the language of Jeremiah, which is speaking their own dream, and which is speaking God's word faithfully. Who is giving us straw (chaff) and who is giving us wheat (what has nutrition and really feeds)?

One answer might be that it is the word that we want to hear. That comforts us and tells us everything will be okay. But then we have the confusion of Jesus' own words in Luke where he says he has come not to bring peace but division. That the word he brings is like fire. And Jeremiah adds the word of God is like a hammer that shatters stone. These aren't words of comfort! It's the idea that God's word breaks us in some way, changes us in an uncomfortable fashion. Is not (at least wholly) comforting.

As Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we believe that the Word of God is Good News and the content of that Good News is both Law and Gospel. That the Word both convicts us (Law) and saves us (Gospel). In this way, the Word of God tells us the truth of a thing, not necessarily what we want to hear.

Martin Luther talked about it like a doctor giving a diagnosis to a patient. You want your doctor to tell you the truth, to not give you false security or illusory hope just so you'll feel better. Because you can't do anything unless you know what the real problem is. If I have cancer, I want my doctor to tell me the truth, so I know what to do and what to expect. So that I can get better.

Still, how do we know what is the Word of God and what are the dreams of some human? Whether this person is telling me the truth about the Word of God?

Well, we look to scripture- the Bible- which we say is the rule and norm of our faith. It is the measuring stick by which we determine these things. Does what this person says correspond to scripture? Can you find support for this position or idea there?

Now, that's just a start because you can find in Psalm 137:9 a verse that says, "Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks!" The Judeans talking to the Babylonians who have conquered them. Even if, to a conquered people who might have suffered this very kind of behavior, you could understand their feeling this way. Does this mean God condones bashing in the heads of infants? Doesn't sound right, does it?

First, this is proof texting, taking a sentence or two of scripture out of its context to support an idea. That's no bueno. Second, just because it's in scripture doesn't mean this is something that corresponds to the reign of God or the Word of God.

So, what then do we do? Well, we turn to Jesus, God's best self-expression to us. Who the Gospel of John calls the Word of God made flesh. Who is not just a Word of God, but THE Word of God. How does this text hold up to what Jesus- THE Word of God - has called us to?

Let's go back to our example. Does Jesus affirm we should bash babies heads in? No. Is there anything Jesus says that would relate to this question? How about the Sermon on the Mount where he calls on us to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us? How about where we are called to turn the other cheek? How he himself did not seek revenge or retribution but prayed for those who killed him- Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.

So, we turn to scripture, we turn to Jesus, but we also turn to our community. We need the wisdom and discernment of others to check that we are not deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. To bring their insight alongside ours so that we might more clearly understand what God is calling us to. Might better discern

who is speaking God's Word and who is dreaming their own dreams. Who can ponder with me the questions of whether this sounds like Jesus or not.

Now, this is not fool-proof. As Jeremiah and the other prophets show, we can deceive ourselves as a community. But only when we all do not follow the steps I've named above. When we all refuse to check what is being said to see if it is the true Word of God.

Finally, something I have picked up as a Christian who happens to be Lutheran. I have what is called a hermeneutic of suspicion. A way of interpreting scripture. My suspicion comes when I find my interpretation affirming my own feelings and biases. When the Word of God (as I understand it) begins to conform pretty consistently with my own desires and wants. Then I get suspicious. Worried that I am dreaming my own dreams and not hearing the Word of God. And this leads me back into the cycle we just talked about.

How do we know what is the Word of God and what is the dream of a human? One thing is to ponder what the Word of God actually does. Theologian Paul Tillich talks about it this way, "The word from the Lord is not an oracle word telling us what to do or to expect. It does not help us manage things in this realm,

instead it elevates us into a new realm- the one that is ultimately important and infinitely significant. God's realm." In my own words, the purpose of the Word of God isn't necessarily to answer a specific question "don't let women serve as pastors or let women serve as pastors ". What it does is change our point of view of that question. Even for a moment, and gives us a glimpse of the truth of a thing. Now, the depth of that glimpse might not be necessary to decide what to wear for today. Or what to order at the drive-through. But when the Word shows us God's realm, when we glimpse the truth of it. Even in those situations, it will shape what we do and say. And it will certainly inform our decisions about whether women can serve as pastors.

Tillich also reminds us that the Word is not something we possess, that is placed under glass and sealed, but it is always being spoken anew. Understood anew. We hold lightly to what we think we know and constantly check ourselves against scripture, Jesus, and do this with others. This is where the Word, like Jesus, is a living Word.

We know when something is the Word when it brings life, not just for some, but for everyone. The Word heals and moves us forward. The Word burns away the chaff in our lives not to punish and hurt, but to free and ultimately to heal.

Friends, this is the first truth. Our God is a God who is near to us, not far away. It is God's great joy that we have already been given the kingdom. And that is ours whether our faith in tribulation sees us through or whether we have been struck down by those circumstances. It is a faith that endures under the pressure of our circumstances not through our fortitude, but because of the Holy Spirit God has gifted to us. Because we have the example of Jesus who has endured the same. Because, as one Quaker pastor put it, if you want to create conflict- work for peace.

Luke tells us, Jesus came to bring peace to the world, to heal divisions, to proclaim release to the captives. So that the blind might see and the deaf might hear. His desire, God's desire, is for us all to be one.

But the reality of sin means that many, including ourselves, will be threatened by this and work against it. This is why Jesus says he brings division. Because sin always squirms and fights in the presence of the reign of God.

But this is what the reign of God looks like. And what we have inherited and been called to live. Loving God with all that we are. Loving our neighbors- those we like and those who are our enemies. Trusting in THE Word of God- Jesus, as we follow on the way.