

Keeping Jesus' Word

Holy Trinity

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 8:48-59

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

Let's talk about taste. No, I don't mean what you do with your mouth. That is the usual sense of this word, but it is not the one to which I am referring. I mean the meaning of the word taste as it is used by the magazine title "Taste of Home" or in the phrase "a taste of life." It is, as dictionary.com says, having an experience, or a slight experience, of something.

Today we celebrate a few different tastes, or lack thereof. For one, some of our youth have graduated or are graduating from high school or college this year. They have had a taste of life in their few years, but will get more experience as they continue on from here and now. In the same way, we have one among us this morning who has completed adult instruction and in a few moments will confirm that she believes as we do so that she may become a member with us in this church. She has received a taste of what it is to be a Lutheran Christian, but there is more to be learned.

These are both uses of the word taste which we would hope would not end with this first taste. Rather, we hope that our students would all continue to learn and serve their neighbors and families. This may take place through starting occupations, furthering their studies, and by continuing to come to hear the Word as a fellow member in Christ.

However, there is a taste we'll talk about that we would hope to never have—a taste of death. Among the other things Jesus talks about in our Gospel text, He mentions the taste of death—well, sort of. He said, "if any of you keeps my word, he will never see death." But the Jews who are speaking with Him quote Him as saying, "If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death." According to commentary, there is no distinction between "seeing" death and "tasting" it. Either way, we most certainly hope to avoid death's taste, but how do we avoid it? We turn to our text to learn about the context of this statement.

Verse 1

The situation in which we hear this statement is the Jews confronting Jesus once again. This time they accuse Jesus of having a demon. This is, as the notes say in the ESV Study Bible, a countercharge against Jesus. Right before our text takes place, in verse forty-four, Jesus had said to them, "You are of your father the devil..." In trying to reverse this, the group of Jews put it back at Jesus that He, not they, had the demon.

One might question at this point if these Jews were honestly trying to determine if Jesus were of God or of Satan, but this is quite clearly *not* the case. To accuse someone of operating under a demon is more than listening to what that person has to say or watching what that person does. These Jews had had several occasions recorded by John prior to this chapter to listen to Jesus' words and to see what He was doing. So when they came to accuse Him of being possessed by a demon, it was because they were against Him.

Have you ever accused the Word of God of being the word of someone else? Did you ever accuse a representative of God of speaking against God? If so, did you first make certain that you were in alignment with God's Word? There is a lot that the Word of God has to say, and not all of it is easy to hear. It is all good, most certainly, but that did not stop God's representatives from being tortured and in cases killed for their faith and for delivering God's message.

Just as it is sometimes pleasant to receive a taste of life, like trying a new experience or making new friends, and other times less pleasant, such as at the death of a loved one or in a difficult situation from which there is no easy exit, so, too, is it sometimes pleasant and sometimes challenging to live as a Christian. There are the blessings and joys of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and potlucks, and there are the trials and crosses to bear in trusting God's Word in this life. When life is going smoothly, it is easier to say that you believe God's Word, but when life tests your faith, it is less easy to say it and live it—especially if you don't know it. In such cases, God's Word may even sound like someone else's word, since God does not always say to walk the easy path. When God's Word says to stop doing a favorite sin, it sounds hard—and it is hard, and yet it is what God desires for you to do. Last week we heard about gossip. We heard how negatively it affects our neighbors' reputations to speak it and spread it, and yet have you stopped? Here's where the world and Satan in his conniving would have you believe that you don't actually have to stop—they would tempt you to believe that God only wants you to be happy, and it makes you happy to spread gossip, and so God must be okay with it. Or that God knows you can't help but sin so go ahead and do it—God loves to forgive. But no, God desires that you stop right now. And that is hard. There are many aspects of the Christian life that are hard, and can be even for your entire earthly life. Giving up a favorite or pet sin is hard—that is why it's called bearing a cross. And again, Satan would have you hold on to that one favorite sin for any number of reasons. He might want you to think: God is loving. He loves you no matter what you do. Or, on the flip side, Satan may make you wonder if God really said. Or, is God's Word really that of a demon?

Verse 2

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.’ The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.””

To these Jews God's Word sounded so foreign that they believed all the more that Jesus had a demon. They argued that their forefather Abraham had died and that the prophets had also died, and so it was impossible for what Jesus was saying to be true. But Jesus wasn't speaking of tasting physical death, but eternal death. The Jews gathered around Him didn't understand, nor did they even try. They had made up their minds that Jesus was blaspheming God and they were out to prove it and to kill Him for it.

Have you already made up your mind about God's Word? Granted there are major themes like Law and Gospel in it, yet even the application of those two doctrines requires years of faith and study to properly live and keep. The first president of the LCMS, C.F.W. Walther, wrote that if one could frequently keep these doctrines in the proper perspective in living them in one's life, that person should have a doctorate in theology.

There is one truth, though, that you should always keep at the forefront as you learn and study and live and keep the faith: that Jesus has paid the price for your sin and you are now God's child. This is how Jesus was able to say that those who believed in Him and kept His Word would never taste or see death. Jesus alludes to His coming death in some of the last verses of our text.

Verse 3

Jesus said, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, “He is our God.”...Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” To this, the Jews again question Jesus out of malice: “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

In His humility and humiliation as a man on earth, Jesus did not attempt to bring glory to Himself. Instead, He kept His Father's Word. He kept it by doing the things His Father desired, and by going to the cross to make payment for the debt that you owed through your sin. Jesus made the full payment for the cost of your sins on the cross, and for that, His Father glorified Him.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit sent to you, as we remembered and rejoiced over last weekend with Pentecost Sunday, you have been called to keep Jesus' and God's Word as well. If you have not been doing so, repent. Repent and believe that your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for you. Then keep Jesus' Word. Do those things which serve your neighbor. Do those things which bring glory to your Father in heaven. Refrain from those things which only serve the flesh and not the spirit. And keep the wonderful truth of your status as God's child in your full view every day.

You are no longer under the law, but in grace. As you live in the grace of Jesus' Word, the Spirit will work in you to love your neighbor and to glorify God, and to refrain from the carnal desires of this life, which only result in death. You have tasted and have seen that the Lord is good through the proclamation of His Word. You will taste it in His very body and very blood given and shed for you in a few minutes at this table. And may you continue to taste and see it from this time forth, and even forevermore, as the Spirit gives you the ability. For all this, we give all glory, honor, and thanks to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in and through Jesus Christ, your crucified and risen Savior. Amen.