

**“Words That Matter”**

*Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).*

This is a big weekend! Saturday our congregation was involved in a city-wide workshop on outreach; after church last night we offered our very first Saturday evening Bible study; in our 8:00 service on Sunday our church family celebrated the baptism of Michael Andrew Shelton; at 9:15 our new Sunday school season began; in our 10:30 service we installed a new teacher in our school (Eliza Askins) and a new music director in our church (Rochelle Starnes); and in all of our services we renewed our commitment to the ministry of Christian education. To the members of our family here at Emmanuel it has been a very exciting weekend, but if we were to look outside of our building, we would have to admit that most of the people in our city have no idea that any of these things are going on. The truth is that for many Americans this weekend IS important – not because of church – but because this is the first weekend of NFL football.

For many fans – including me – the beginning of a new NFL season also means “fantasy football!” There are many different ways to play fantasy football, and some people get downright crazy about it. For me it’s a simple pastime that amounts to picking a roster each week and then checking to see how my players did over the weekend. In our fantasy league no money is spent, and the only thing at stake is pride. There are, however, two rules that you must follow to play. First, you have to stay within a salary cap. Each week fantasy teams are given a fictional budget of fifty-million dollars to spend on eight players, and in order to get any points for your fantasy team you have to stay under the fifty-million dollar spending limit. The second rule is equally important. In order to get points for a given week, each fantasy player must submit his roster before the kickoff of that week’s first game. This is usually not a problem, but this week the games began on Thursday, a fact that I remembered halfway through my supper on Thursday night. So with just twenty minutes left before the kickoff deadline, I found myself at the computer frantically trying to register my team.

I got online and went to our fantasy league website. Everything was going great, until I was asked for my username and password. I’ve played in this fantasy football league for the last ten years and have always used the same password, but when I typed in the words I remembered using for my password last fall the computer responded with a notice in large red letters that read “Incorrect Password - Access Denied.” Thinking that I must have hit a wrong key, I typed in the password again and hit return. I received the same response. I started to panic, and as the clock to kickoff ticked down, I tried almost every possible form of my password only to repeatedly see it denied. Finally, with ten minutes to go, I gave up and went through the entire online registration process as a new user so that I could get my team in the league before it was too late.

Computers are ridiculous. You can sit for hours in front of the screen trying to remember a password that you were sure you would never forget; you can try a thousand different word combinations; but unless you use exactly the right password you will not be able to go where you want to go. Computers don’t reward persistence and they don’t honor good intentions. To a computer, the right password is the only thing that matters.

In a similar way, when it comes to our relationship with God, the wrong words don't work, and they cannot get us to God! Our efforts to connect with God and find meaning in this life are like the countless combinations of letters we throw together in an attempt to find the right computer password. No matter how hard we work and no matter how earnest our intentions may be, without the right words we are lost!

Peter understood this. Peter realized that his search to find meaning through his own words and actions had not worked, and he also realized that the words of Jesus were different. Peter realized that the words of Jesus were not based in this life. Peter knew that Jesus' words spoke of a future beyond this world. Peter knew that Jesus' words mattered, and in today's reading, when confronted with the question of whether he and the other disciples would also leave Jesus, Peter answered with a confession of faith that still speaks to us today, "Lord, who else can we turn to? Only you have the words of eternal life."

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter understood that the only words that matter in this life are words that lead to eternal life, and he knew that the only place those words could be found was in Jesus! My friends: what was true for Peter 2000 years ago is also true for us today! The words of eternal life – the only words that matter – are found in the announcement that Jesus came for us! The words of eternal life – the only words that matter – are found in the message that Jesus went to the cross in our place, to pay for our sins! The words of eternal life – the only words that matter – are found in the proclamation that "whoever believes in Christ will not die, but live forever" (John 3:16).

In the book of Acts Peter says with great boldness "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12). This statement tells us that the words of this life truly do not matter, and that our eternal future is found only in the words and person of Jesus Christ! In a world where football is more important than faith, and instant gratification is the norm, the words of eternal life are more important than ever before!

Today as we dedicate ourselves to the ministry of Christian education we need to understand that what we are committing to is sharing the words of eternal life. This is critically important, because to a world that is frantically searching for meaning in all the wrong words, these words matter!

The words of Christ matter because they do for us what our own words and the words of the world can never do. The words of Christ matter because they tell us that God loves us! These words matter because they tell us that we are forgiven! These words matter because they tell us that we have a future with God!

All that we do as God's people is based on the words of Christ. Why has God brought you here today? Because hearing these words matters! Why do we give time and money to a ministry for the benefit of others? Because proclaiming these words matters! Why do we spend nearly half of our congregational budget on the ministry of Lutheran schools? Because teaching these words matters!

The words of Christ are always words of eternal life, and as we share these words with the people God has placed into our lives, God will change the world with words that matter. Amen.

Reverend Thomas A. Eggold  
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