

# “GOD’S WORD DOES WHAT IT SAYS”

John 4:46-54

Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity

October 16, 2016

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel is recorded by the apostle John, chapter 4, verses 46 through 54. It is on page 753 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus gives a sign to prove that his Word does what it says. Please stand, as you are able, for the gospel. From John 4, we begin reading at verse 46.

<sup>46</sup> So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. <sup>47</sup> When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. <sup>48</sup> So Jesus said to him, “Unless you [people] see signs and wonders you will not believe.” <sup>49</sup> The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. <sup>51</sup> As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. <sup>52</sup> So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” <sup>53</sup> The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. <sup>54</sup> This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*  
You may be seated.

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Dear Mikaila, today you were baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it is a good thing for you that God’s Word does what it says. Because it means that when Jesus said, “Make disciples ... by baptizing ... and teaching ...” (Matt. 28:19-20), he meant that it would actually happen. This Baptism really is the beginning of your life as a disciple of Jesus and a child of God. His Word does what it says. And as you are taught his Word, you will grow in this new life of yours, because God’s Word does what it says.

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Words can be a powerful thing.  
People say,

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
but words can never hurt me.*

But we all know it isn’t true.

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
and words ... well ... they can hurt me too.*

Words can be a powerful thing—both for evil ... and for good. Choosing your words wisely can be the difference between a cold shoulder and a warm embrace. How much you talk back to your parents can be the difference between dessert and cleaning your room.

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Words can even be the difference between life and death, or between freedom and bondage. Perhaps you have heard a judge ask the question, “Has the jury reached a verdict?” Then one of the members of the jury stands up and says, “We have, your honor.” And the next words out of that jury member’s mouth make the difference between an innocent person walking home and a guilty person being walked to prison.

Words can be a powerful thing. Some words are powerful because they communicate reality. Other words are powerful because they *create* reality.

The words, “I love you,” can be powerful because they communicate reality. But the words, “You’re grounded,” are powerful because they actually *create* a reality.

Of course, it all depends on who says those words. If your little brother says, “You’re grounded,” it probably doesn’t mean anything. But if your mother or father says, “You’re grounded,” then their words create the reality that you are staying home on Friday night. No football for you.

The power of words depends on the authority of the person who speaks them. The words of parents carry their authority. And the words of *God* carry his authority. So God’s Word does what it says.

This is what we see in the healing of a royal official’s son. Jesus does not even go to Capernaum with the man, as he pleaded. Jesus simply says, “Your son will live” (4:50). And he does.

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
but Jesus’ Word will fix those bones ...  
and the rest of the body too.*

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God’s Word does what it says. It has been this way from the very beginning.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). And how did he do it? He said, “Let there be ...” And there was. God spoke the universe into existence. God is sovereign over all creation. And his Word carries his authority. He said, “Let there be ...” And there was.

Skeptics, of course, want to believe everything happened by random chance through the Big Bang and evolution. But many of the things they thought they knew—things about DNA or the nature of the universe ... Many of these ideas they based their theories on, turned out not to be true. The more we learn about the complexity of the universe, the less defensible naturalistic theories become, and the more we realize that something or someone had to cause the universe to be.

But I have to rein myself in a little bit, because sermons are not scientific treatises. If you want to talk more about it, ask me later. That would be fun. And if you disagree with me, I would enjoy listening. But for now, my simple point is that it is not crazy to think that things might have actually happened the way the Bible says they did, especially when Jesus shows up on the scene and his words start creating reality.

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God’s Word does what it says. The same powerful Word, that created the universe and everything in it, was on display when Jesus said to a certain royal official, “Your son will live.”

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This historical account takes place in the city of Cana, in the northern region of Israel. This was the same place where Jesus turned water into wine. And a royal official came from the city of Capernaum to beg Jesus for help.

Now, Capernaum and Cana were about twenty miles apart. And remember, twenty miles today is not the same as twenty miles 2,000 years ago. Yes; twenty miles is twenty miles. But it’s different when you have to walk it. When you have a car, twenty miles means twenty minutes. But when all you have is ... sandals, twenty miles means ... most of the day.

So the man walks twenty miles to see Jesus, just to ask him to walk twenty miles back with him to heal his son. He does this without knowing what Jesus will say. And it turns out, Jesus refuses to go. Jesus’ first response actually seems a little harsh. He says, “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe” (4:48).

It kind of sounds like an insult—like Jesus is insulting their faith. But I don’t think it is an insult. I think it’s more of a statement of reality. Because, in the end, Jesus did give the man a sign. In fact, the sign Jesus gave him was far more astonishing than what he asked for. And because of this sign, he and his entire household believed.

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It would be much better if we simply took God at his Word. But instead, sometimes we have this attitude that God has to prove himself to us: *Alright God, if you think you’re so great, do this for me.*

Well, God doesn’t have to prove himself to anyone, but the remarkable thing is: sometimes he does.

But he doesn’t always prove himself the way we want him to. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows that if he does what we want him to do, we still might not believe. We might just say, “That was cool; let’s see if that’ll work again. What should I ask for?”

The fact is: some of us don’t really want to believe. We just want to get what we want. And if there is a god, we want to have him on our own terms. We want God to be the way we want him to be, but we’re not so sure about a God who has a mind of his own. We’re not so sure about a God who won’t give us everything we want. We’re not so sure about a God whose morals are a little bit stricter than our own. We would rather have God on our own terms. We would rather create God in our own image.

But the problem is: we have evil desires. So if we have evil desires, and God is who we want him to be, then God would have to be evil, and that would not be good for anyone.

So, if God is good, and he most certainly is, then he has to be something other than what we really want him to be. And, at least sometimes, he has to give us something other than what we ask for.

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So when this royal official from Capernaum asks Jesus for a favor, Jesus gives him something, but he doesn’t give him exactly what he asks for, because he doesn’t ask for enough.

The people want signs and wonders, and they will have a hard time believing without them. So Jesus gives them signs and wonders, but he doesn’t give them the ones they ask for. Instead, he gives them the ones he knows they need.

Jesus sees a problem, not just with this man from Capernaum, but with all the people. They won’t take Jesus at his Word. He has to prove himself through signs and wonders. These, they

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think, are more valuable than his Word. So Jesus gives them a sign that proves the power of his Word.

It’s kind of like Jesus is saying, “Okay, I can see that you people have a hard time believing my Word. So I’m going to show you what my Word can do.”

So when the man pleads with Jesus again, “Sir, come down before my child dies” (4:49), Jesus simply says, “Go; your son will live” (4:50).

And then, perhaps the most remarkable part of the account is, “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way” (4:50). Jesus gave him no sign, at least not yet. He just told him to go.

This is the same man to whom Jesus said, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” But then he does believe, because Jesus’ Word does what it says. If Jesus says he will live, he will live. So even though the man received no sign, he believes Jesus’ Word, and he goes home.

There was no sign until the next day, when “his servants met him [on the road] and told him that his son was recovering” (4:51). And when he asked them when he started getting better, he learned it was the same time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” Because of this sign, he and his entire household believed in Jesus.

This was now the second sign Jesus performed.

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So what does the sign mean? Is it just a display of power, or does it teach us something about Jesus?

There is a reason Jesus didn’t go with the man to Capernaum. And it’s not because Jesus is lazy and just didn’t want to walk twenty miles. Jesus wanted to demonstrate who he is. He’s not just some miracle worker. He wanted to demonstrate that he is the one whose words have authority over all things, including death. Jesus doesn’t even have to see the sick boy. He can be twenty miles away. And yet, his words create reality. Not since the creation of the world has such power been displayed. This sign shows that Jesus is God in human flesh. His words prove that he is the God who created the universe and everything in it, without actually having to say so. His words prove it by their power.

It is a sign that reveals who Jesus is. It assures us that when he says something, it will come to pass. Whatever Jesus says will be, will be. God’s Word does what it says.

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And it wasn’t just a sign for this royal official’s family or the people in Galilee. It is a sign for you and me. The *Gospel of John* contains seven signs like this one. And toward the end of the book, John writes,

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31).

These things were not done in a corner. Jesus did these things in public. And word of these signs spread all over Israel. And when it was all said and done, books were written, not generations later, as if these events were legends, but while the eyewitnesses were still alive, and while Jesus’ opponents were still alive. And that’s important. His opponents had every

opportunity to deny the validity of the signs, but they didn’t. They were there. They heard the reports. They heard eyewitness testimony. Some of them saw the signs with their own eyes.

They opposed Jesus, but they didn’t deny the signs. They couldn’t. Instead, they claimed Jesus performed miracles by the power of the devil. That was the best explanation they could come up with, because they could not deny the signs, and they knew it. Even Jesus enemies had to admit his power.

So when John says these things are written so that we may believe. He’s not talking about fairy tales. He’s talking about historical records from the first century.

You want a sign? It’s right here—the public testimony of who Jesus is and what he did. Your assurance that his Word does what it says. Whether it has to do with the creation of the world, a sick child in Capernaum, your baptism, the forgiveness of your sins, or the resurrection from the dead, God’s Word does what it says.

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When God’s Word says to you—to all of you—“Your sins are forgiven,” God’s Word does what it says. It forgives.

But you should know, this isn’t just some magic trick God does to make them all go away. There has to be something behind those words. And the thing behind those words is the cross.

If God were to just ignore your sin, he would have to recant his Word. He would have to recant the time he said, “When you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2:17). He would have to recant all the times he said, “Thou shalt not.” He would have to recant everything he said about cursing and swearing, dishonoring parents, murder, hatred, and strife, adultery, lust, and pornography, stealing, cheating and lying, jealousy and greed, and every other kind of selfishness and disobedience. But God will recant none of his words, because his commandments are good, and if he withheld from punishing sin, he would not be just. And God is most certainly just.

This is what the cross is all about. Look at it. But do not look at it as a meaningless piece of wood we hang on the wall. Look at it as a sign of what God did for you. Look at it as a sign of the reality it represents—a beaten, bloodied, naked, and innocent man hanging on a real instrument of torture and execution. Look at it as a sign of a real cross, where the true God in human flesh, bore the true punishment for all your sin.

And there he died. On that cross, the Son of God in human flesh died a human death. And he was laid in a real tomb.

This is the length Jesus Christ went to so that when he says, “Your sins are forgiven,” his Word does what it says.

And then on the third day, Jesus walked out of that tomb, just as he said he would. And he showed himself to hundreds of eyewitnesses, as a sign, so that the whole world would know that he is who he says he is, and his Word does what it says.

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This is what Jesus had to do so that his words, “Your sin will live,” would ring true forever. Without his death and resurrection, Jesus’ promise to that father would have been temporary, because the son still would have remained under the curse of sin and death. It would have been like saying, “Your son will live ... but only until he dies again.” What kind of promise is that?

That’s all the sick boy’s father wanted. But God can do better. And he does.

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The promise Jesus made to that anxious father was an eternal promise. “Your son will live ... today ... and forever.” That man went home with the promise that even if his son got sick again—even if he had to lay his body in the ground after all—Jesus’ Word would still be true, because God’s Word does what it says. And God has still not yet spoken every word he intends to speak on this earth.

Jesus has one more Word: *arise*. And when he speaks that Word, you will, because God’s Word does what it says. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.