

“Infallible. Gift.” John 14:23-29

“Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.””

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This is not something strange. This is not something that we can’t relate to. This is actually something very familiar to us. When we love someone, what do we want to do? Sure, we want to be together, we want to converse, we want to listen to them.

All of that comes naturally. When we love. Thus, what Jesus says in today’s Gospel shouldn’t by any means surprise us. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word.” And, “whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”

Do we love Jesus? Or do we not? Do we want to listen to Him, do we want to hear, read, digest, meditate upon, delight in, share, marvel about and keep His Word? Or not? What is the role of God’s Word in your life? Our Lutheran Church praises herself for being the Word centred Church.

Just the last week, at our SA/NT Synodical Convention we confessed it all together that we “accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.” It was beautiful. It certainly was...

But is it also true? What is the place of the Word of God, of the Old and New Testament in our lives? Practically? Is it “the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life?” Is that the role of the Word in our life?

Or it is more like: “We accept that the Holy Scripture is... this and this and this, and now – what do *you* think about these matters? And what about you? Let’s listen to one another and other voices! What answers do *you* find relevant for you?

What do *you* think about God? What do *you* think about us, why are we here? Meaning and purpose of our lives? What do you think about our relationships? Marriage? Sexuality? Work? Rest? Creation? Eternity? Sacraments? What about the Church? What do you think the Church is, what her mission is, what should she do?

Let's ask everyone for what they would like the Church to be like, so that all views and preferences are included!" Unfortunately, this is how too many Christians go about when considering their faith and doctrine and life.

I guess, often it is probably done with good intentions to show that we care for people, for what they think, that we care to listen to them, to consider their perspective. That is all good, unless we stop there; at our ideas and opinions and preferences.

Then there is only one perspective, one voice that is left out, excluded, not heard, ignored – what the Lord of the Church Jesus Christ says to us about all these matters. It's likely you have witnessed this attitude playing out in practice.

When Christians instead of looking for answers in the Holy Scripture are much more interested to listen to one another and themselves. What can be more lovely than the sound of my own voice and the incredible depth of my own wisdom?!

Christian schools engage with their students bringing up different relevant cultural topics, and that's good; but too often instead of teaching to listen to the Lord, they simply go with: "So, what do you think about this or that?" And thus – we become the infallible sources and norms for all matters of faith, doctrine and life. We...

How often that is how Bible studies are run, when instead of trying to understand what the Lord of the Holy Writings says, Christians spend time reflecting on what they make of that passage, how it makes them feel, etc. But how can we be disciples of Jesus if we don't want to listen to Him and keep His Word?

"But, Pastor, don't be so narrow, we should be more open, we should not be judging other views and ideas, we should go with time." If what pastors preach are their own thoughts only, just ignore them. Don't waste your time! There are better things to do.

But in this case, it may be worth listening, and listening very carefully. Because this is not what some pastors have come up. This is what Jesus says, what He instructs His disciples to do. It is about the 1st Commandment, about the greatest commandment.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." You shall love your God – but how? "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word ... and whoever does not love me does not keep my words."

We hear this echoing throughout the Scriptures: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31). "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (John 15:10) "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3). And so on. "Whoever loves me, keeps my Word."

If we love our God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, then we will gladly listen to Him, we will keenly search for His will and wisdom, we will allow His Word and Spirit to shape us, to transform us, to remake us more in the Image of Jesus.

It is not always fun or pleasant, for as Paul the apostle put it: “[The Word of God] has divine power ... to destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Cor 10:4-5)

If we love Jesus and keep His Word, it may challenge us in our deepest convictions, especially if we are adult converts, it may put us out of step with society and our loved ones. It may bring heat and discord in our relationship. And even if we are life-long Christians, it may make us to re-evaluate some of our beliefs.

And then there is another problem. What often happens when we hear a command, an expression of God’s good and holy will for our lives? Honestly? Do we gladly listen and submit to it? You reflect on what happens to you, I can tell you about myself. The old Adam in me doesn’t like the whole obedience thing.

Especially if it contradicts to what my heart desires. To what I believe is right. I do want to do things my way, I do want to make up my own mind. Surely, I know better... The old Adam in me likes when I am asked: “What are *your* thoughts about this or that?”

Thus, what Jesus says to us may come as cold shower to the old Adam in us: “If you love me, you will keep my Word”. Period. Hm... But then we also need to recognize that what Jesus says actually showers upon us His incredible divine gifts.

It’s just that in our self-centredness we struggle to see what this is all about. Our old and rebellious nature is oblivious about God’s ways. But let’s try to see this – the Triune God, the Creator of heavens and earth, your Creator, He comes to us, to His little and funny favourite creatures and He reveals Himself, He speaks to us.

He then commands to record His message, His Word, so that everyone can read or hear it. Everyone, across the time and globe. Then He sends His servants, His imperfect and often strange messengers to bring His message to the ends of the earth.

Today you heard His voice, He continues to speak to us in His Word. “If you love me, you will keep my Word”. And as you keep it, and abide in it, as you study it diligently, and rejoice in it, this Word will change your life, it will give you a new life.

Fine, but what exactly is there to keep? We can simplify and say that there are two main themes, or two main teachings in God’s Word. One is the instructions of the Lord, His holy and unchanging will for your life, His wisdom for your flourishing.

And when we strive to keep it, to live accordingly, amazing things are promised to us and they do actually happen. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” Did you hear this? Are you shocked? Are you amazed?

When we carefully listen to the Word, when we try to keep it in our lives, the Holy God Himself comes to help us, He indwells with us, He makes home with you, and He Himself gently changes your heart, so that you long and delight to keep His Word.

The Holy Spirit Himself enlightens you, He opens your eyes and fill you with God's wisdom, He helps you to see the world as beautiful and lovely as God sees it, He leads you to Jesus and He reminds you about everything that Jesus has spoken to us and enables you to take pleasure in it, and He makes you a blessing to others.

As you keep His Word. But that's not all. There is the other teaching that we need to keep – God's promises. Promises! Why would we even need an encouragement to focus on them?! They are the most wonderful message that we have received. We should be amazed by these promises, we should cling to them with all our strengths!

As we keep our eyes focused on them, God's promises deliver to us the greatest comfort and joy. Forgiveness. It brings forth a new reality. God the Father looks at you: "You are good, you are very good, beautiful and lovely in my eyes!"

The voice of the Father speaking to us in God's Word brings us freedom, freedom from guilt, freedom from blaming others, freedom for trying to show how good we are, freedom to confess – "I have sinned" – freedom to ask for forgiveness – "please, forgive me, brother, forgive me, sister!" And freedom to forgive: "I forgive you!"

These promises give us not less than new identity and new life. You have been adopted in God's family. Jesus sees you as His brother and His sister, and God the Father sees you as His own beloved child. That's you. Each one of you!

This new life begins here, for now you are united with the very source of life, the Triune God, but this new life will not end here. In fact, it will never end. The One who has made home with you, who has embraced you, even if we struggle to appreciate it, He will carry you on, and He will bring you to dwell with Him.

In that incredible place of bliss and pleasures where we will see Him as He is face-to-face. New identity, new life, new hope, new reality, this is what Jesus promises give you. You don't need to toil to obtain those gifts, someone else has done the toiling.

Someone who loves you so much that He keeps His eyes focused on you all the days of your life. Just keep His Word, meditate upon it, rejoice in it, let it fill you with gladness. For as we can see, when the Triune God commands us anything, it is not what our old nature thinks it is. God's commands are vessels of heavenly blessings.

"If you love me, keep my Word!" We should be begging our God: "Please, allow us to keep your Word, please!" For there are no greater blessings in this world than those given to us in the words that Jesus even today speaks to you.

So, what is the role of God's Word in your life? "The only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life..." This is not so much about us doing something. This is about humbly receiving an undeserved gift, infallible gift of our unbelievably gracious and generous God. "If you love me, you will keep my Word, and I will make home with you! I promise."

Help us, Father, to love Jesus and help us to keep His Word! Amen.