

Hooked on a Feeling

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made,” (John 1:1-3). Meet Jesus. He is the very Word of God made flesh that we would know the true salvation of God and be set free from the tyranny of the Devil, sin, and everlasting death. Many Christians believe that God speaks to them outside of the parameters of how God actually reveals Himself to us in Jesus, the Word made flesh. The name for these kinds of claims is “enthusiasm.”

What are we to make of the claims of the enthusiasts? When these claims are made, where are we to turn to know the truth of the matter? In the end, we can only know the truth as we believe, teach, and confess that the eternal Words of God Himself are found in Jesus and that all “revelation” outside of Him is to be dismissed – or as St. Peter put it, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God,”* (John 6:68-69). Jesus’ words are eternal life because where the word of God is there also is God Himself with forgiveness for poor miserable sinners.

But we might wonder first, “Does God even speak to us in the first place?” As Lutherans we cry an emphatic, “YES!” He has spoken to us since the beginning of time but always through His Word. *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world,”* (Heb. 1:1-2). This is God speaking for the sake of those who would hear and believe. This is not God speaking outside of Himself (that is, the Word) but through Himself and for the sake of the world. This Word given and spoken hasn’t come to help you get that shiny new car, but above all else, He has come reconciling the world to Himself by feeding our bodies and souls through the means of grace.

This understanding of the true Word of God is blatantly different than the understanding of the enthusiasts which often comes in the form of “God spoke to me.” This phrase is used by many self-proclaimed Christians all over the world and they expect confessing Christians to accept it as divine truth because quite frankly, who are we to say that God has not spoken to them? This may seem harmless enough or something that can be fixed with a good eye-roll followed by a trip down the dusty trail, but in reality these faux self-made revelations do actual harm to the Body of Christ. Since all theology and life comes to us only from the God-man who is Jesus Christ our Lord and all revelation regarding God comes only through Him, to claim otherwise is to create our own “gospel” and preach soot and ash into the ears of the deaf. But *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ...To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God...”* These secrets of the kingdom of God come not from self-made revelation but through the Word which is from eternity and was made man that we would be reconciled to the Father and know the truth of the pure word of God – born for you, crucified for you, raised for you, and given to you in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These things revealed by the Word do something no “revelation” of our own making could ever do.

The one thing that we can be sure of when it comes to the revelation of God’s word to us is this: The Word, which is from eternity, came to us by humbly becoming flesh and by so making His Word to dwell among us that we would know God and His salvific works. Because of this truth, the Bride of Christ rejoices that where the Word of God is there also is God Himself, inseparable from it. This is the word for us; God for us in the very person of Jesus. So where does God’s word speak? He speaks via the external word. He speaks through the Holy Bible read, marked, and inwardly digested. It is sacramentally consumed both in baptism and in the Lord’s Supper. These sacraments aren’t simply acts of obedience we do only after which God will speak His word to us. No, it is in the sacraments that the word is partaken of, forgiveness is given, and faith is edified. These things are not separate from God for where the word of God is there also is God Himself, loving us, defending us, and insuring eternal rest from our labours. Luther expounded on these great truths when he wrote, *Do you really want to consider the Word of the Gospel on a par with the word of a peasant in an inn or a*

tavern? Remember that God has said: When the Word of Christ is preached, I am in your mouth, and I pass with the Word through your ears into your heart. So, then, we have a sure sign and know that when the Gospel is preached, God is then the speaker and is distributing His own true Word for the life of the world.

These feelings are the hook and crux of enthusiasm. Yet, let us never forget that feelings are fickle. They rise and fall with sinful and simple human passions and persuasions. This is not Christ. The true Christ is not fickle but instead constant in the giving of Himself. Enthusiasm burdens the conscience as it makes finding Jesus a chore – something we must do. Christ always bears the yoke and is never meant to be made the yoke that we must bear. If then we desire all that is meet, right, and salutary then we must go to where God has promised to be – His Word and Sacrament. And since this is true, then so is the old adage, “Go to church!” If one desires to have Jesus, then he must confess as Simon Peter confessed, “*Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*” The only way to go to Jesus is to flee for refuge in the very place that Jesus, and thereby the word of eternal life, reside: the temple of the Lord where the word is rightly delivered and the sacraments properly administered. All else is folly and whimsy.

It is in the Holy House of our Lord that the living word is given in great abundance for the grace-parched soul. Here Jesus pours Himself from the cross and onto our lips that we would know what it means to be free. Here in the church that Christ Himself built we are free from the chore of guessing or manufacturing feelings. Here, there is only the truth given into your ears, mouths, and souls. Since our feelings, emotions, and self-made revelations are unpredictable, we must go to the reliable source of all hope, love, forgiveness and the promise of the resurrection of the dead. The jewel of Lutheranism is that we have God’s Word given to us. This means that we don’t have to make it up as our fancies’ binge and purge. Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to us the words of everlasting life the pearls not meant for swine, and the only source of truth and life. In this we are meant to be but humble receivers of God’s greatest gift – Himself – to hear, eat, and drink. Here we can know with certainty that eternal life is ours. It is our great assurance – that where the Word of God is, there too is God Himself.