

Those born and bred in the heart of Dixie have a vocabulary all their own. It is not a “thing,” but a “thang.” It is never a “fire,” but a “far.” You will never hear anyone talk about going to a “dance,” they always go to a “day-ins.” And, how the racing association gets its name, “That’s a Nahs car!” But if you were not raised down in the southern part of the Lower 48, all you need to say is one word and a true Southerner will say, “Ya’ll ain’t from ‘round here, are ya?”

It only takes one word. It is true if you are a Yankee in Dixie; it is even more true if you are the Lord’s Servant. In our text, the Servant says, “He made My mouth like a sharp sword.”

A “mouth like a sharp sword” is one that is similar to the mouth of the coming Davidic deliverer, described as the one who will “strike the earth with the rod of His mouth” (Isaiah 11:4). Unlike the Persian King Cyrus, who waged war against Babylon “according to the flesh,” the Servant will employ weapons “not of the flesh but [that] have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). In a world in which the rise and fall of nations appears to be determined *not* by prophetic pronouncements but by imperial armies, this may seem like a feeble piece of equipment.

But in Isaiah 40-55, the power of God’s Word is highlighted. Isaiah 40:8 says, “Grass withers, flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Isaiah 55:10-11 says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” And from Isaiah’s third Servant Song in chapter 50: “The Sovereign Lord has given Me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary” (50:4).

When God speaks, things happen. It only takes a word. For example, a road sign says “Stop” and we stop. A bill says “Due,” and if we have the money, we pay now. In these instances, it only takes one word!

Writing in the eighth century BC, Isaiah presents the Servant to those Israelites who were exiled in Babylon in the sixth century BC. Their temple had been burned and demolished. Their king Zedekiah had his eyes gouged out at Riblah after witnessing the butchering of his sons. Judah’s entire way of living had come to a brutal end by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and his captain Nebuzaradan. The exiles only knew defeat. Their liturgy is summarized in these words from 40:27: “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.”

If you have ever been divorced by a spouse or abandoned by a parent, you have echoed these words. If you have ever been hurt so badly that you could not reach deep enough inside to express the pain, you have lived this nightmare. If you have ever fought horrifying demons from your past, you know this chaos.

Overcome by life in Babylon, the exiles turned to the fleeting, the temporary, the quick fixes. They were so bold as to say in 56:12: “Come, let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer!” In the agony of defeat, so often you and I get sucked into what is shallow, superficial, cheap, and dirty. Looking for quick revenge, spouses get tangled up in one-night stands. Students take shortcuts and then they are caught cheating. Parents neglect their children to pour everything into their own careers. The result? We find ourselves in the despair of exile: “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God.”

Enter Yahweh’s Servant, who says in our text, “He made My mouth like a sharp sword.” Just one word will set right what is so wrong with our lives. To quote from the Ethiopian eunuch who speaks to Phillip about this same Servant, “‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Phillip told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:34-35). Jesus is the Servant in our text who needs only one word to

accomplish His Father's mission and bring order to a fallen and shattered world.

Anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism, Jesus is thrust into the wilderness to meet the enemy. He goes to battle with a thunderous *gegraptai*, which, although one word in Greek, means "It is written" in English. To "bruised reeds and smoldering wicks" like the man with leprosy, His word was *katharisthaytee*, which is, again, just one word in Greek; we translate it, "Be clean." He rebuked the chaotic wind and waves with *siopa*, "Be quiet." To the deaf and dumb man He cried out, *ephatha*, "Be opened." Luther put it this way (and you can correct my German afterwards): "Ein Wörtlein (Vert-line) kann (can) ihn (in) fällen (felon)" or "One little word can fell him!" The centurion in Matthew 8:8 gets it right when he says to Jesus, "But just say the word, and my servant will be healed."

Climactically, Jesus would marshal just one word. Isaiah's third Servant Song sets the stage: "I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6). Arrested, bound, tried, slapped, beaten, stripped, scourged, abandoned, spiked, forsaken -- He uttered one more word, *tetelestai*; in English, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

All that the Old Testament had foreshadowed, foretold, predicted, prefigured, and promised is now complete, it is done, it is finished, tetelestai! The serpent is crushed, the Lamb is slain, the atonement is made, the Passover is complete, and the banquet is ready. From the cross, He speaks one-word descriptions over us: forgiven, washed, cleansed, justified, loved!

Meaning what? Meaning He still speaks order into our chaos! Hebrews 4:12 puts it this way: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.” His Word, connected with water, bread, and wine--placed upon our foreheads and into our mouths--delivers restoration, healing, and forgiveness. We are bought in the blood, sealed with the Sacraments, and abounding in hope and joy!

To the student who holds defeated dreams, He speaks. To the couple with a barren womb and fervent prayers, He speaks. To the Christian who daily fights with his flesh only to lose time after time, He speaks. To any person who has felt the sting of death, the power of the Law, or the torment of guilt, He speaks. And so we speak back to Him, “Lord, just say the word, and we will be healed.”

But the final restoration is yet to come. At His second coming, the Servant will return as a rider on a white horse. His name will be called Faithful and True, King of kings and Lord of lords. On that day the ultimate

one-word victory will be uttered and we will finally come home. John records it in Revelation 21:6, gegonan -- "It is done!"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.