

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
1 Kings 22:10-28; 2 Peter 1:20-2:3; Matthew 7:15-29  
*The Word of the Lord Endures Forever*

One of my favorite things about seminary was book auctions. When pastors retired or went home to the Lord or decided they weren't ever going to read a portion of library again for whatever reason, they would often donate their books to the seminary bookstore, and the bookstore manager would hold a few auctions for those books each year when they began to pile up. It was a marvelous night: stacks of books, a bunch of buddies, and a keg of beer—talk about a party.

There was one problem with the book auction, however. With every good lot, the bookstore manager would throw in a bunch of books he knew no one was going to buy otherwise—fad books about forty days of this and four steps to that and dealing with the culture of 1963 or 1975. And so in addition to your treasures, you amassed quite the mountain of junk, and when you got home it looked to your wife like you'd bought the whole auction. Some guys threw out the fad books. Some threw a bonfire. I've never been one able to throw out a book, so I've mostly lugged them from place to place, trying to keep them out of sight in shame.

Maybe you haven't bought the books, but I bet you've lugged some fads as well. Think of your high school yearbook. Maybe you were the fad. Think of those appliances from the seventies. Who knew green could look so hip? Think of some of the clothes in your closet you were at one time so proud of. How come you're not sporting the same haircut anymore? How come ABC Warehouse doesn't stock that green these days? How come you're not decked out in those trendy duds for church today? How come I'm not sharing anything I learned from those fad books in my sermons or bible classes? I'll tell you why: some things just don't last. I'm not dealing with the culture of 1974, the forty steps are cheesy, and four steps just don't get you where they used to. St. Peter puts it like this in his first letter: ***“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.”***

All three of our lessons focus on the unchanging nature of the Word. Sure, the clothes and hair on the people in the pews change, and yes, some of the specific challenges of decades or cultures shift, and of course, each congregation has a different persona, but the Word remains the same, and, in the end, the people aren't all that different either. They all are tempted to sin. They all lose that fight with temptation a lot more often than they'd like to admit. They all need to be called back to repentance. They all need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sinners. Bellbottoms or mullets, parachute pants or lines shaved in their heads, olive green or burnt orange, the need stays the same, the problems aren't as different as they seem.

In our first lesson, we see one of the reasons why people think the Word should change: they simply don't like what it says. When Ahab, the king of Israel, summoned the LORD's prophet, Micaiah, his messenger warned, ***“Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.”*** In other words, the king didn't want a word from the LORD. The king wanted a manufactured yes in the LORD's name. Those are two very different things.

Micaiah first answered the king sarcastically. ***“Yeah, go triumph. Yea, king. The LORD thinks you're the bomb.”*** Ahab wanted the prophet to sell the lie to the king of Judah, so he reprimanded him, and so Micaiah spoke the truth: ***“You go, you die, and Israel loses.”*** And what did the king do? He pouted. He threw a tantrum. ***“Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?”*** he complained to Jehoshaphat, the godly king from Judah, who had insisted on a real prophet from the LORD. And he had Micaiah imprisoned and starved. And he thought he knew better than the LORD, was wiser than His Word. And he learned the hard way he wasn't. The dogs licked up his blood as they washed his chariot after the battle. He died. He died in sin. He died forever. And so will we if we die in defiance to the Word, if we think we know better than the LORD, are wiser than His Word.

St. Peter addresses a similar issue in our second lesson. False prophets would arise among the early Christians and for the rest of history, preaching heresy in order to gain prestige, to feed their sinful passions,

and to heap up material wealth. These false teachers would start small, St. Peter warns. At first, it would hardly seem like a big deal. But as they gained acceptance in the small things, they would go to work on the big things, so that in the end they would end up ***“even denying the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction.”*** And they would be popular. ***“Many will follow,”*** he adds. Why? Because they like what they hear, even if it means ***“the way of the truth will be blasphemed.”*** And so teacher and hearer alike would be destroyed, would be condemned to hell. And all because of a few small changes, a few inconsequential new teachings, a few harmless compromises that set things in motion.

And as the church begins to look more and more like the world today, dressing up its alterations in the most pious terms, as a desire to save the lost or better communicate the message, how can we not receive St. Peter’s warning most earnestly and examine ourselves. Have we been vigilant? Have we been willing to compromise our faith for personal convenience or sinful indulgence? Have we put pious terms on impious actions, crafty excuses on inexcusable things? Have we been tempted to speak more of what people want to hear and less of what they don’t, irregardless of what God’s Word says?

I know that as a pastor I’ve felt the tugs at my heart to avoid the difficult road, to run away from the hard discussion, to not risk offending a member, knowing they’ll have no problem finding a church that says what they want to hear. Unless you’re superhuman, you’ve faced the same temptations as a brother and sister in Christ, a friend, a husband or wife, a parent or child, and everything in between. What if your son or daughter doesn’t want to hear that? What if your husband or wife won’t take kindly to being reminded of what God says? What if your father or mother doesn’t want to grow up in God’s grace? It’s not easy, is it? But St. Peter reminds us, ***“Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”***

And if you’re hoping Jesus will say something different, you’re out of luck. He’s clear as can be in the Holy Gospel:

***Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.***

We don’t have to look far to find confirmation of Jesus’ words. Think of the backslidden Christian you’re friends with. Think of the once solid church your family used to attend. Think of the family member full of potential who threw it all away to gamble on the empty promises of fleeting pleasures. Think even of society. Are we stronger as a nation for the sexual revolution, for the breakdown of the family, for not only the acceptance but the promotion of every kind of deviation from the universal mores of bygone days more consistent, though not synonymous, with God’s law, or have we become so advanced that we can’t even tell our left hand from our right hand half the time anymore?

The Word of God is no fad. The Word of the Lord endures forever. And let us be ever thankful for that. That Word is not a burden; it is salvation. That Word does not oppress us; it liberates us from all that would enslave us after Christ has set us free from sin and death and hell. That Word is the rock on which we build our house and live, safe from the passing winds and pouring rain of the world and the flesh, because that Word gives us Jesus, crucified for our sin, and dwelling in us through faith to make us fruitful in His service. Every other way, every other promise, every other teaching that does not conform with this can lead only to destruction, to dogs lapping up blood, houses falling in upon themselves, sinners condemned to destruction. The Word of the Lord endures forever. We have that Word. Let’s keep hold of it. Amen.