

Those born and bred in the heart of Dixie have a vocabulary all their own. It's not "man," but "may-on." It's not a "thing," but a "thang." It's never a "fire," but a "far." You'll never hear anyone talk about going to a "dance," they always go to a "day-ins." And a big business way down South isn't "oil business," it's "awl-beniss." But if you weren't raised down South, 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's true if you're a Yankee in Dixie; it's even more true if you're 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 deliverer descended from David and 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 as St. Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 10, "not of the flesh but [that] have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Now compared to a fierce army filled with well-equipped soldiers along with chariots and horses, the Word of God may seem like a pretty weak piece of equipment. But in Isaiah 40-55, the tremendous power of God's Word is highlighted. Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever." Isaiah 55:10-11, "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: "The LORD God has given Me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary" (50:4).

When God speaks, things happen. It only takes a word. For example, a road sign says "Stop" and we stop. A parent might look at a messy room and say, "Clean," and we clean—quickly! A bill says "Due," and if we have the money, we pay now. In all these cases, 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've ever been divorced by a spouse or abandoned by a parent, you've echoed these words. If you've ever been hurt so badly that you couldn't reach deep enough inside to express the pain, you've lived this nightmare. If you've 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 affairs. 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."

But along comes 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. **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 *katharistheti*, 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: “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 use 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, *tetelestia*; in English, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

All that the Old Testament had foreshadowed, foretold, predicted, prefigured, and promised is now complete, done, finished. 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!

And what does this all mean? It means 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!

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 and 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!”

To the Christian who daily fights struggles against sin only to lose time after time, He speaks. To a nation, indeed a world, gripped in fear and locked in by quarantine, He speaks. To the student who holds defeated dreams because of all this, He speaks.

To any person who has felt the sting of death, the power of the Law, or the torment of guilt, He speaks: You are forgiven. You are loved. With Me you are safe. And so we speak back to Him, “Lord, just say the word, and we will be healed.” In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.