

Words That Do What They Say
Sermon for Trinity Sunday
Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:3-14



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, ⁶to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. ¹³In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

Stephen is covered from head to toe in sores and wounds. His body is ruined from drugs, neglect, many nights spent in the cold, and many days without proper nourishment. But the worst part isn't his outward appearance. The worst part is what's inside him. What's inside is the destructiveness of drugs that destroy his life and how it sucks him day by day deeper into a pit of destruction. Sometimes he grabs some object like his shoe, scolding and cursing it with such emotion as though this shoe were the source of hell itself and to blame for everything. But there are also days when you can have a completely normal conversation with Stephen. On those days, he understands very well that he is responsible for his life and must get help with his drug problem and if he doesn't get help, he'll die. Most of the time, I get the impression that Stephen needs more than just words to persuade him to take this step. He needs productive words that do what they promise. He needs a command from heaven to make his life new. Stephen is actually like all of us – left to our own devices, we are doomed. We need productive words that create new things.

In the Bible, we get to know such inspired words that are more than just words. They are words that produce what they promise out of nothing. Such words are also called “blessings.” Words of blessing in the Bible are not just good wishes but a concrete transfer of everything that God wants to give a person. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* In the original language, the word that is used for *praise* that we give to God is the same as *blessing*, things God gives to us. So you could translate this verse as: Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us. This word, blessing, is just such a word that not only is good to say but also produces what it promises! Such a word of blessing can only be spoken by God. But here, the blessing goes in the other direction because God is being blessed! But that's just at first glance. When we look at the text again, we see that the blessing has its beginnings with God and starts with Him. God blesses us and only then are the gates of heaven opened and the blessing flows in both directions – from God to us and back to God. Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday. We celebrate the being of God as He has revealed Himself to us in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity can truly only be celebrated with great admiration, praise, and blessing. All philosophical and rational explanations about the nature of God are doomed to failure because we can neither explain nor fathom His nature. But we can stand amazed at His works as He has revealed Himself to us. This is exactly what happens in the book of Ephesians. Amazed and blessed, the book of Ephesians takes us on a trip into God's presence. Why does it dare to do this? First because God the Father first speaks to us. Second because God becomes man through Jesus. And third because the Holy Spirit gives us clarity.

First: it is only because God speaks to us, that can we also talk about Him. When we talk about God, we should stop before the gate of heaven, where vigilant angels prevent us from entering and say: “Holy, holy, holy!” Or in other words: “No entrance because you are sinful people and have nothing to do with God!” Basically, we can't get close to God ourselves, not with our thoughts or with our prayers. Actually, we can't presume to even mention God's name. But God Himself thought of us already at the beginning of the world and spoke of us. Because of God's words, God's nature therefore came to us and touched us because God's words have always been more than just empty words, but instead, they have been words of blessing that do what they say. And only

because of that will the gates of heaven be opened and we can also then talk about God. We can only be amazed about this. It could have been different. After we had renounced God, He could have renounced us. He could have said that humans are nothing more than ants that can be left to our own devices. But it's not so for God. The only reason we are here is because God wanted us and always wants us. He wanted us exactly as we are. He chose us, where we would live, what language we would speak, what we would look like. God has personally reached out to each and every one of us. God wanted people who are His children – children that He gives eternal life to and that He blesses, to whom He gives fellowship with Himself not just once, but every single day. And not just all people in general but also to you personally!

The will of God to bless us is not just a spiritual process that happens far away from us in heaven. God wanting us is above our ability and capacity to understand, yet His wanting us doesn't just stay in heaven, but comes to us here on earth. Through Jesus Christ, God enters into our story. Through Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself in our lives. Jesus Christ is therefore not an idea nor a mystical experience, but a human. And when we are baptized, we aren't just told about all that Jesus has done for us, but the salvation through Jesus also does what His words promise. This is how Jesus becomes tangible in our lives. When Jesus Christ says: "This is My body" and "This is My blood," He also says: "for you!" In this way, He enters into our lives in a real and tangible way. Jesus becomes human in us, He becomes one with us, He brings what He did for us on the cross into our lives, and He also goes out into the world with us. God once said to Abraham many years ago: "I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). Through Jesus, this blessing from God becomes reality. We are blessed and the blessings continue to flow because Jesus is in us!

The question now is, how does this all happen? It can be that we know many things from the Bible or memorized many Bible passages, but somehow, all of this remains theoretical, and we don't know what God has to do with our lives. Like Stephen, I too can hear thousands of words, but they somehow have no effect and no producing power. You could compare it to water which flows throughout our city and houses by way of many pipes. The water comes from a source. Each water faucet must be connected to this source. Without this connection, no water will flow. If I had to start the flow of blessings myself, I would be like someone tinkering with a water faucet that has no connection to the source. No matter how much I work on it, nothing happens as long as the connection to the source isn't right. As an individual Christian, I do that when I ask myself: "Where then is the proof that all of this is true for me? And where is God specifically working in my life?" I also ask myself: "Am I even a Christian when there are still so many weaknesses and mistakes in my life? Aren't these all signs that God hasn't yet entered my life?" God doesn't want us to be ignorant and doubting. At the beginning, I said that blessing starts with God. God *chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*. So blessings flow down from above and that alone makes it certain, there is absolutely no doubt about this – the Holy Spirit is this firm and secure connection to God. Paul tells us in Ephesians that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance with which we are sealed. You could also translate the word guarantee as deposit. When I must buy something very valuable and expensive, I don't pay the full price, but a deposit. At the same time, this deposit is a contractually agreed promise that the full amount will be paid in the future. The surprising thing about this passage is that God Himself gives this guarantee in the Holy Spirit. For God, everything is clear and determined. He has put His seal on us. It's clear that we have received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. This means that we don't have all the fullness of God because we are still living on this earth. Nevertheless, we have complete clarity and openness to God. And so that we can be absolutely sure, God has determined the places where the water flows from Him to us. These places are where we hear His Word, they are the places where we receive Holy Communion and Baptism. Praise God that these places aren't our own inventions but that God Himself has established them. That's why there are productive words among us. That's why no one needs to go away empty-handed. That's why we can always continue to receive and pass on these Words of Life – from heaven to us and from us to others. Amen.