

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Epiphany 6, Series A  
Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Sermon: Straight Talk  
Text: Matthew 5:33-37

Focus: Jesus tells us to say what we mean and do what we say.

Function: That they rejoice that all of Jesus' words are true.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way" (SC, 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. "I swear to God!" "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye!" "I swear on my Grandmother's grave!" Children love to swear—and so do we. I'm not talking about swearing as in cussing, but as in making an oath, taking a vow, making a "pinky swear." When people don't believe us, we resort to oaths, as though somehow we're less likely to perjure ourselves if we swear "on a stack of Bibles." In court we promise to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," but we all know that witnesses lie.

My personal favorite is when someone answers you by saying, “To be *honest*...” Anyone who talks like this is immediately suspect, as if they were being *dishonest* all the other times! But to be honest [*pause for laughter*], we all break our word, back down on our agreements, and sometimes lie. “You shall not bear false witness...,” God commands in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:16, ESV).<sup>1</sup> (It’s the 8<sup>th</sup> of ten!) But fallen, sinful humanity is as false as they come. *We* are as false as they come.

One of my favorite movies is *Jerry Maguire* (1996), which stars Tom Cruise as a down-and-out sports agent trying to get the newest NFL rookie quarterback—the great Frank Cushman—to sign a contract with him. When Jerry meets with Cush’s father, however, the older Cushman balks at signing anything. “You know me, Jerry! My word is stronger than oak.” After Jerry and Mr. Cushman shake hands to seal the deal, Jerry drives back home elated, blasting his favorite songs from the radio and laughing away as he pounds the steering wheel excitedly. But when he gets to the NFL draft, he’s dismayed to discover that his former

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

coworker-turned-competitor, Jay, roped the Cushmans into signing a contract with him! Jerry loses his best client! Hurt and furious, afraid of losing his #1 client, he confronts Cush's dad, who tries to justify his broken promise by saying he'd do anything for his boy. Jerry is crushed by the older Cushman's wavering word and spends the rest of the movie trying to get his career—and life—back on track.

I think we can all relate to Jerry's predicament. At one time or another, we've all been the victims of someone breaking their word. There is a certain kind of person who will say one thing to your face, and then say the complete opposite behind your back. There's a certain kind of person who will pledge to do one thing, but then passively-aggressively undermine the work when you're not looking. There's a certain kind of person who's always the first to volunteer and sign on the dotted line, but they lack the follow-through to carry out what they commit to. There's a certain kind of person who hardly ever keeps a promise or a friend's confidence or something that doesn't need to be said. There's a certain kind of person like you and I.

How many broken promises have we made? How many empty words have we spoken? Parents disappoint children when they don't show up for their children's school play or baseball game like they promised. Angry, bitter couples divorce despite at one time promising "I do" before the Lord's altar. Business partners destroy their friendship when they sue each other for breach of contract. These are all ways in which we break our word. *[Slowly]* We say, "I do," but we don't. We say, "I will," but we really won't. Talk is cheap, and we're cashing in our words like we're running out of time.

But Jesus insists we should do the exact opposite. Words matter. We should be true to our word and never need to invoke an oath in order to convince others we're telling the truth. "Do not take an oath at all," Jesus says, "either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King" (Matt. 5:34-35). (*Aside:* We might add our grandmother's grave to Jesus' list, too!) Instead of swearing and making vows until we're blue in the face, we should keep our words plain and true. "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matt.

5:37). “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no, so that you may not fall under condemnation” (Jas. 5:12). In other words: say what you mean, and do what you say.

One pastor writes, “The disciples of Jesus are not to use words lightly....”<sup>2</sup> Jesus places high priority on what we say. On the Last Day, we will be judged by what we have said in this life. “I tell you,” Jesus says, “on the day of judgment people will give account for *every* careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

In another place, Jesus tells a story about keeping your word:

“A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ ...” (Matt. 21:28-31).

The answer is obvious: the one who actually went out and worked! The son who intended to go but instead kicked back on the couch did *not* do

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 300.

the will of his father. His “yes” was really “no”—and that comes from the evil one, the devil.

So what kind of son or daughter are you? Are you a faithful child of God, true to your word, and—even more importantly—true to *God’s* Word? Or are you someone who says one thing and does another? Do you let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no,” or do you muddle your words and break your promises to the people around you? If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are all liars and cheats, every one of us. We don’t say what we mean, and we don’t do as we say. We do not let our “yes” be “yes” and our “no” be “no.” We split hairs over words and make excuses when we fail to follow through.

But the Good News is that there is Someone who *always* keeps his Word. That Person is Jesus Christ, who is himself the Word of God made human flesh (John 1:1, 14). According to Scripture, “all the promises of God find their Yes in him...” (2 Cor. 1:20). “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you..., was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes” (2 Cor. 1:19). Jesus is God’s “Yes!” Jesus says what he means and does what he says. He always keeps his

Word. He never waffles. He never breaks a promise. His Word is reliable and true—“stronger than oak”—stronger than the wood of the cross on which he died in order to keep his Word. Jesus’ Word is true because God never lies (Tit. 1:2).

Here are just a few of the wonderful promises Jesus makes to you: “Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matt. 21:22). “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7). “Neither do I condemn you...” (John 8:11). “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). And “I am coming soon” (Rev. 3:11; 22:17, 12, 20).

Throughout Scripture, God promises to love us, forgive us, heal us, protect us, guide us, and save us. All of God’s promises find their Yes in Jesus. His Word is certain; his Word is truth (John 17:17). Not one of God’s promises ever failed (Josh. 21:45)—they’re *all* fulfilled in Christ! So there is hope for you when you believe the Word of Jesus,

the one who never lies, the one who is the “Yes” to all the promises of God.

And now, as God’s forgiven people, as disciples of Jesus who believe his Word of truth, we are called to be truthful people ourselves. We are called to bear the truth of God’s Word in our own hearts, minds—and tongues.

So here are a few ideas. If you have lied to someone recently, maybe it’s time to say you’re sorry. If you have gossiped or slandered someone behind their back, maybe it’s time to swallow your pride, talk to them face to face, and ask for their forgiveness. If you have broken a promise or failed to follow-through on something, now is the time to make good on your word and do what you said you were going to do. And if you have the reputation of being an undependable person, it’s time to start letting your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no.” By God’s grace, Jesus can turn us into a certain kind of person—*his* kind of person—men and women of truth. And so with the psalmist we sing, “I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people” (Ps.



116:18). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy  
Spirit. Amen.