

Acts 16: 9 – 15  
Revelation 21: 10, 22-22:5  
John 14: 23 – 29  
6 Easter Yr. C.

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May 1, 2016

### **“On Keeping Words”**

Years ago, I had a fascinating conversation with an international student. After having been on campus for several months, we met for coffee to talk about his program. He complained that his fellow American students were not truthful – in fact, he called them all liars. I was a bit stunned and asked why he felt that way. He proceeded to say that they did not keep their word. I asked for an example, still not getting the problem. He told me of a charming young woman who told him upon leaving class that, “I’ll see you soon.” He waited all the next day but did not see her. Then she said to him on leaving class, “We should get together for coffee.” She never mentioned it again. Finally, one day, another student said to him, “Oh, you should visit my home-town, you would love it.” The poor international student blurted out, “Shall we go this weekend?” only to be met by awkward silence. Those conversations proved to him that these two people and, by extension, all Americans were liars. Of course, what he ran into was our penchant for casual “white lies.” Those things we say not because we mean them but because they ease social situations. Everybody knows that to say, “See you around” is not an actual promise but a sort of vague hope that, somehow, someday, we might have another conversation in the unknown future - maybe. Indeed, sometimes we hope people hear not our spoken message but the underlying unspoken message which is often 100% opposite of what we said. When one politician speaks of his honorable opponent, what he really means is that the other guy is a crook and a liar. When some people say to us, “With all due respect,” what they really mean is that they think we are complete numb-skulls and should be ignored. With the right inflection, referring to someone as a distinguished leader can actually mean that the person is a complete fool and lunatic. How often it is that we do not say what we mean and we do not mean what we say.

Our law courts are filled with cases of people not keeping their word. Contracts apparently are made to be broken though only in one direction and promises are remarkably provisional, entirely dependent on future moods, the possibility of something more interesting coming along, or, perhaps, the phases of the moon. The acronym RSVP is, in our day, without any common meaning. For far too many people, it means maybe I will let you know that I am coming, or it means I thought I might come, or sometimes it means I will show up but late and with an extra guest that I was sure you would want me to bring.

Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” Implicit in this wonderful statement is that God will keep God’s word and desires us to keep God’s word as well. And what, exactly, are God’s words? Jesus makes it very clear that God’s words consist of words of peace, of untroubled hearts, and unafraid lives. The eternal words, the ones spoken by the Word made flesh are words of peace, words of compassion, words of love, and words of joy. And these words are far more than mere words spoken carelessly or thoughtlessly. These words form a Way of being, a pattern

of living, a code of conduct, a rule of life. And when we conform ourselves to this Way, this pattern, this code, this rule, God comes to us and makes a home with us.

Now these words that form the Way of Christ are not about highly specific actions we can take mindlessly. They are more a mind-set, a way of interacting with the world than a technical manual. They require us to read, learn, inwardly digest, and live fully into these words. We can be trapped by the human interpretations of the words of Christ Jesus. We need to return to those words again and again to test our behavior against those simple words.

Love one another as I have loved you. I have come to drive away no one. Feed my sheep, tend my lambs, and again, feed my sheep. My peace I give to you. Give as I have given; not as the world gives. Be not afraid; let not your hearts be troubled.

So many of the words the world gives us are slippery words, given provisionally. So many of the gifts the world gives are provisional gifts. There are almost always strings attached. Certain exceptions always seem to apply. Warranties are always limited. Past performance does not predict future results.

God does not give as the world gives and that annoys us from time to time. The gifts of God are often not what we expected which, actually, can be why we know they are from God. God's gifts are never provisional or conditional. God's gifts are given to us freely; what we do with them is up to us.

I have said before that I believe God will ask all of us two questions when we stand before the great judgment seat – “Did you figure out all the gifts I gave you?” “What did you do with the gifts you received?” Thus, one of tasks is to discern what gifts we have for we all have many gifts. And then our task is to use them and use them wisely. Did we add to the world's store of peace through our lives? Did we reduce the amount of trouble in the world by our actions? Did we reduce the amount of fear in our own lives and in the lives of others? Did we find time in our lives to speak to others as Paul did in Phillipi? Did we by word and example, draw others to a life of love and caring? Were we, like the tree of life, bearers of much fruit and makers of leaves of healing? In sum, did we keep the words we were taught, the words we have heard again and again?

It is not always easy to keep one's words. We can and do make rash promises, we enter into agreements we do not always understand. We create ways of being that are impossible to maintain. But we are called to work hard every day to keep God's words – both for ourselves and for others. Fortunately, God's words are simpler than human words. We are to love as we are loved. We are to care as we are cared for. We are to help as we have been helped. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. We are to offer peace as we have sought peace. We are to end fear as we seek to be unafraid.

When we pray to God, we are like Lydia who said to Paul, “If you have judged me to be faithful, come and stay with me.” If we keep God's words, we will be with God right here on earth. We will need no Temple for God is with us. God will dwell with us and we will never be afraid. God will dwell with us and in us and we truly will know that peace which passes all

understanding. The Lord our God will be our light and our life and nothing accursed will be found with us any more. Amen.