

*“But the word of the Lord stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:25)*

### **Stand with the Word!**

Whose side are you on? This week, ABC cancelled the reboot of the TV show *Roseanne* because of an offensive tweet Roseanne Barr sent out. And the other night, one of the local news programs did an online poll about whether you agreed or disagreed with their reaction. At the time that I watched the news, “disagree” was leading by six or seven points. Which side are you on? I’ll be honest – I really don’t care. I never watched the original show and I never watched the reboot either. But some people are really worked up about it, both for and against. For them, taking a stand, either against what Roseanne Barr tweeted or against what the network did has become symbolic of where you stand in our deeply divided country. Now, I’m not going to get into the controversy that this tweet generated. Rather, my point is that there are just situations in life that demand that you take a stand. Whether this controversy rises to that level or not, being a Christian in a sinful world demands that we take a stand on a more fundamental issue. This year, here at Peace, we’ve used 1 Peter 1:25 as our theme: **the word of the Lord stands forever**. Now that the school year is done and we’ve studied and heard that word through another academic year, and you graduates are leaving, **stand with that word!**

#### **I.**

**It’s what we’ve taught you!** Every day, you had catechism or Christlight. Every week, you came to chapel and hopefully came to church. Throughout your day, you were reminded again and again of what God’s Word says. And, of course, the heart of that word is Jesus and what he did for you. That’s what Peter was talking about in the letter he wrote. He quoted Isaiah who says that all people are like grass which withers and flowers which fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. Then he said, **“And this is the word that was preached to you.”** Now Peter wrote those words almost two thousand years ago. The Christians who first got this letter and knew Peter personally are all dead. Their bodies turned to dust long ago. But this message is still here.

This letter still exists today. Now, the actual letter that Peter wrote is long gone. No one has seen it in almost two thousand years. Besides Peter and a man named Silas who appears to have served as his scribe, we don’t know the name of single person who ever held it in his hands. But for almost 1500 years, people made copies of it by hand. They did the same thing with all the rest of the 66 books in the Bible. When you consider how hard that is and how long it would take, it’s almost a miracle that we have our Bibles today. But the Word of the Lord stands forever – because God gave that word to teach us about Jesus.

Isaiah pointed to how quickly plants fade away because his people were farmers. We’ve just started summer. The trees are full of leaves and the grass is growing. Yet, sometime in July or August, our lawns might be brown from lack of rain. By October or November, the leaves will be off the trees. Whatever we grew in our gardens will be dead and gone. If Peter and Isaiah had lived in Detroit today, they might have used different examples. A few months ago, my wife and I bought a new car. The last time we did that was just days before you called me to be your pastor. When we moved here, that car still had its new car smell. But today, it has almost 200,000 miles on it. It is a few dents and it’s missing a wheel cover. Let’s just say that it doesn’t smell new on the inside anymore. Everything in this life ages. Everything in this life dies – we human beings and all that we achieve most of all. But God’s word stands forever. So our number one mission here at Peace Lutheran Church and School is to give you that word.

But words die, too. How many conversations can you remember with people who have gone home to heaven? When you die, who will remember those words? King Solomon said, **“Of making many books, there is no end.”** This week I was trying to fit some new books on the shelves in my office and I didn’t have enough space. So I went through a couple shelves and asked myself if I really needed everything that was on them. I threw out half a dozen older works that no one uses anymore. Eventually, they will be completely forgotten. History tells us the names of dozens of books that don’t exist anymore. Human words die. But the word of the Lord stands forever.

God put his power into that word. In fact, it was God’s word that created the universe. God said, **“Let there be light.”** And there was light. God’s word cannot die, no matter how many people want to erase it from

our society and no matter how many Christians fail to read it. God's word will still be here when this world ends.

In that word, we have the message that makes all the difference in our lives. That word tells us what God thinks of us – the bad and the good. It tells us that he hates our sin. He hates it when we neglect what he has said. He hates it when our thoughts and opinions and desires drive our words and our actions. And he condemns that sin. He sends sinners to hell. But that word also tells us how much he loves us. He sent Jesus to pay for every time we failed to love his word or to listen to his word, for every time our own words and ideas trumped God's in our hearts. Jesus died and suffered hell to set us free from that sin. That is God's Word, too. So is the message that he rose and announced that all our sin is gone forever. You are forgiven. I am forgiven. That word stands forever. That word will carry us into eternity. That word reminds us that God loves us and listens to us and helps us. Stand with that word as long as you live on this earth.

## II.

**Stand with the word. It's what gave you new birth.** One of the best things about being the pastor of a church with a school is that I get to hear so many children express their faith in so many ways. It was a joy to hear this year's graduates sing God's praises when they were kindergarteners just as it was a joy this year to hear those kindergarteners do the same thing. It was a joy watching those 8<sup>th</sup> graders grow and hearing them confess that faith year after year, just as I hope it will be for these kindergarteners. But how did these kids get to be believers? Is it just because they were born into a Christian family? Without a doubt God used that. But you don't inherit your faith. It's not in your genes, like having blue eyes or a receding hairline. You get your faith through the word. Parents – and also pastors and teachers – bring that word to you, but then the Holy Spirit who works through that word and gives you faith.

That's what Peter meant when he said, "**For you have been born again, ... through the living and enduring word of God.**" In what sense is the word "living"? Your Bibles don't breathe. They don't eat or drink or think. They're just pieces of paper. But the Word comes from God and it has his power built into it. So the word is living primarily in the sense that it gives us life. It even gives us our physical lives, since God created all life through his word and he sustains all things, including life, by his powerful word. But primarily, we're talking here about spiritual life. Spiritually speaking, every human being is stillborn. We're born spiritually dead and separated from God. But you are born again when you come to faith. God gives you that birth and that new, spiritual life through the word.

In truth, the only reason to have a school here at Peace is to give and maintain that new life. Over the years we've had parents send their kids to our school who hadn't go to church before and did not understand the gospel. When their kids came, they didn't always have faith. But the gospel worked. The Holy Spirit gave those kids spiritual life. They were born again. But more often what happens is that we get kids who already know their Savior. But life can die. So that same word of God that gives life keeps that life going. It feeds it. It sustains it. It strengthens it to face all things until we get to heaven.

One of the most important things that the word does is lead us to repentance. While we live down here, we're far from perfect. The new life is there in our hearts. But death lives right next to it. We all have a sinful nature that fights against our faith. Sometimes, that sinful nature makes it hard for pastors and teachers to see the faith that a child has. Sometimes, it makes it hard for parents to be sure that their children know and believe in Jesus. Sometimes, even a child – or a teenager or an adult – will question whether their faith is real. They don't remember their new birth and they have trouble seeing the new life that's there. What makes it so hard? Sin. When I fall into the same sins again, even after fighting with all my might against temptation, I might question whether my faith is real. When I wonder if what the Bible says is really true, when I listen to arguments from unbelievers and I think those things sounds better than what my pastor or my teacher said, I might start to wonder if I'm losing my faith. In a sinful world, we all have doubts and questions and we all sin.

But what does the word tell us? Jesus paid for that sin. Jesus had the perfect faith that I can't have here, and the perfect life that comes from perfect faith. So now, God sees me as perfect no matter how hard it is for me to see myself that way. Jesus died and he paid for every sin I ever commit, even the ones that I know I should resist. He suffered hell so that we don't have to. That price is paid even when I feel guilty and question how real my faith is. Jesus rose to tell the whole world that God is satisfied. You are forgiven, my friends. I am forgiven. The Holy Spirit came through that living and enduring word, through that promise that lasts forever, and he put faith and new life into our hearts. He uses that same promise to comfort us when we sin and

to strengthen us when we are tormented by doubt. He will renew our faith with those gospel promises for as long as we live here.

Now that doesn't mean we'll ever be perfect here. But we will be in heaven. There we will finally have the kind of faith we only wish we could have here. But until we get there, we need the gospel to keep that faith alive. We can only lose God's promises if we walk away from his word. God will chase us. But he won't force us to come back. He'll call us. He'll discipline us. He may let us suffer terrible things in this life and they may come because we sinned. But his goal is to bring us back. Only when we throw all his efforts away and give up on our faith will we lose what God has given us.

Does that sound scary? It's supposed to. But you know what? If you're afraid, you're OK. That warning is for when we're not afraid. It's for when we think we can do it all on our own. It's for those days when we don't think we need to go church again. That's when God warns us that walking away will destroy us. And that is part of his eternal word. But when we're afraid, when we think we might lose our faith and never come back, God doesn't threaten us. He comforts us. He tells us that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. He tells us that he will never forget that we are forgiven. He promises to work through the gospel in the word and in the sacraments to keep our faith alive until we reach heaven. That, too, is part of his Word that stands forever.

So don't ever leave that word. All God asks you to do is come and hear it. He works through that gospel to make your faith strong. Stand on his word. It's your defense against all evil, your strength in all temptation, your life preserver when you feel like you're sinking in a raging sea. It's the very power of God. Trust it and cling to it forever. Amen.