

## God's Word Still Works!

✠ **Creating and preserving (v.10)**

✠ **Hardening and converting (v.11)**

In the name of Jesus, the Word of God in human flesh and blood, dear fellow servants of the Word:

It has often been said that the Christian Church is always just one generation away from extinction. Stop and think about this. If we fail to teach God's Word to our children, faith and the salvation it receives is lost to our grandchildren and great grandchildren too. So when church leaders see sagging attendance and dwindling membership, the natural tendency is to try all the harder to bring in more people with a softer message or more exciting worship experience. Whether it's pride in the pastors or greed in the people, it all comes down to the Fall of our first parents in the Garden paradise of God. When Satan asked, "**Has God really said...?**" Eve and her abdicating husband answered by their actions, "We're not really sure. We'll do what we want instead." Death resulted for the entire human race. Death still comes whenever Christians rely on outward methods whether PowerPoint presentations, contemporary services, and yes, even traditional liturgies. Human forms and delivery systems fail without it, but **God's Word Still Works!** Just look around. Still today our God is...

✠ **Creating and preserving (v.10)**

Aren't these beautiful words for Spring and Summer? "*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater....*" Do you notice the premise behind those words? You can literally open the Bible to any part and without reading far at all find that the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 is assumed as a building block of the entire Scripture. Rightly it has been said that every teaching of the Bible is contained in the first eleven chapters; all the rest is commentary.

Preaching against evolution here would be like lecturing the choir on the importance of music. It reminds me of a world renowned physicist from the University of Beijing, China, describing how Pastor Loren Steele lectured her one day about the foolishness of evolution. He laughed while she recounted that she finally interrupted him and said, "Pastor Steele, you can't teach me anything about science. This is my field and it's clear to me how utterly stupid evolution really is. Just teach me about Jesus."

*"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only [Begotten], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:3,14 NIV) Human reason will never get a grip on this, but faith has no trouble at all. Since God's Word says so, faith simply accepts that He who made the elements can easily rearrange and organize them into what today we misname "Mother Nature." That same Word can hold everything up and keep it all going until the Last Day which God has already determined. Your body cells have turgidity so that you don't collapse like a bag of meat. By God's order the pillars of the planet hold the surface above the molten core. The stars can't fall from the sky while He orders their orbits. Hollywood's best action heroes would run out of nukes on the second or third asteroid. But God's Word never runs out of power to create and preserve. Consistency in miracles is what preserves our food chain. Our Creator sees to it that water mixed with dirt, sun and seed not only make plants grow, but produce the same kinds. If durum wheat seeds sometimes produced poisonous plants, pasta would do far more harm than too many carbohydrates. God's good order gives an undeserving country like ours such riches that one of our biggest challenges is trying not to eat too much. God is good and merciful to the least deserving whether we thank Him or not.

But do we still believe that the God who created His world keeps preserving it too? Can He still create more of whatever we need? It popped up again in a WELS Pre-Convention Q and A email this week. The fear exists that churches starting missions without synod funding may be decreasing their offerings to synod home and world missions. The real fear here is that we have a stingy God who keeps demanding more and more from the little pie He dished up for us to cut into smaller and smaller pieces. Let's confess this sin. We have a very myopic, narrow minded view of God. We do not give Him the praise and thanks He deserves not only for previous gifts of overcrowded closets and waistlines, but all that future needs He has promised to fill for our synod, church, home and family. If God can make grass grow for cows to eat to give their milk to run the farms that load the trucks and stock the shelves and pour the milk on your morning breakfast – can He not also with His still-powerful **Word** provide your family with food and your church and synod with mission resources? God forgive us for our unbelief He is still **Creating and preserving. God's Word Still Works!** We're just not working His **Word** as we ought.

### **Hardening and converting (v.11)**

*“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it”* – sometimes **Hardening**, sometimes **converting**, but always working. I may not always see it, especially not when and where I want it, but quoting the little plastic medallion on a collegiate's dashboard: “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.”

It was heartbreaking for me as a boy when my best friend not only would not come to church with me, but after a while didn't even want to play anymore. When the neighbor girls started answering our girls with the same excuse for not accepting a ride to Sunday School or VBS, it was disappointingly obvious their parents were coaching them. How can it be that when we work so hard to invite and welcome our neighbors to worship, some don't return? While so many appreciate our friendliness and fellowship, why are others so cold? Do we need a more lively worship style? Or a softer message?

Ah, there comes the challenge of this generation because even some of our WELS members want to blame all our outreach problems on our liturgy in spite of updating it only a few years ago. But what happens when the focus shifts to high tech delivery and a more entertaining worship style? I found out at WELS Tech 2001 when the preacher asked what I thought of his PowerPoint sermon that had everyone so excited. “You certainly convicted me of my sin,” I told him. “My coldness to Christ's call of reaching the lost certainly was condemned, and rightly so. But you did not tell me my sins are forgiven.” His answer was something to the effect that “I thought you already knew that.” He dropped the Gospel. In response should we take a hard line and make sure we never change anything in the old hymns or liturgy – here or anywhere else in our home or world missions? Sing no new songs?

God's **“purpose”** with Pharaoh was to make an international example of his feeble false gods. Whether Moses spoke barefoot, in sandals or cowboy boots, God was **Hardening** Pharaoh's heart. Yet Moses had to proclaim the **Word** of the LORD. No matter what our style of liturgy, or no liturgy, some will always reject the message of Christ-crucified. It hurts to admit we are all wretched sinners deserving of eternal damnation. **Hardening** is part of God's **“alien task”** (Isaiah 28:21) with His **Word**. **Hardening** is what we all deserve. But in absolute independence ruling high above all human criticism, the LORD God also says, **“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.** (Exodus 33:19 NIV) **God's Word Still Works!** We need to work the **Word** by paying attention to our liturgy which tells us Christ died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. In some European churches **God's Word** in the liturgy is all that kept the church alive for decades because the people heard the Gospel: Our sins are all forgiven. May God's powerful Word kindle in us a steadfast determination to read our Bibles at home, worship regularly and attend Bible class with homework completed. May **God's Word** keep **Converting** us and our children away from sin to salvation. Amen.