

Why is it so important for people to have the last word? It's true, isn't it? The opposing guests on a cable news show each want the last word. We saw it last Tuesday night, but that's all I'll say about that. But we know it's true for ourselves too, isn't it? We want the last word in a conversations, our arguments... I mean, “discussions.” Just a quick word of advice: Husbands, if you want the last word in a “discussion” with your wife, make sure it's, “Yes, dear.”

Having the last word validates our opinions and self-worth, even though we may be inconsiderate of the many feelings and opinions of others. Having the last word helps us maintain our own personal status quo or way of life by convincing ourselves that we're right and don't need to change.

Of course, there are times when we may regret our need to have the last word, maybe a time when we see how much it really did hurt someone else. But even more regrettable will be to insist on the last word in our conversation with God. Not only would that cut off all conversation with Him for all eternity, but it would also mean missing the joy of relationship that He wants to have with us here and now, because, finally, when all is said and done, Jesus is the last word.

God had given His Word to Israel, and it was such blessed last word. God had spoken, calling them His special people, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, despite their rebelliousness displaying His unlimited goodness in giving them provisions for life, bringing them into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Thus, the master of Jesus' parable gives a rich vineyard to tenants. He plants it, fences it in, digs a winepress, and builds a tower. If there was anything more he could have done, he would have. Then he leaves the whole operation to his tenants, giving them the benefits of his labors, trusting them to give a portion of the fruit in season.

What a wonderful picture of what God had done for Israel! This was God's Word, His promise, he would shower blessings on them for all eternity! He'd given His word, and He would have been delighted for that to be the last word.

God is the Creator-Giver of every good thing. The same sort of blessings He gave Israel, He's given to us. Comparing ourselves to much of the rest of the world, most have been blessed with abundant and varied supply of food and clothing, and comfortable and even lavish homes. We have been blessed with a form of government that gives citizens the last word, which can be exercised in less than a month.

More importantly, in the spiritual realm He's made the same promise to us; that He will be our loving giving God and we will be His beloved people, for eternity. He has provided His means of grace, so that as His forgiven people we might be sustained in faith until He calls us home. He has provided a faithful church body, congregation, and pastor so that we can hear clearly the message of salvation, that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works.

Even when God's people rebelled and refused to bear fruit, He sent his word again and again—through prophets. The master sent one servant after another to receive the fruit. Oh, that any of these could simply be the last word!: “All is forgiven! You are still mine!”

Finally, last of all, God sent His Son, the Word who was God, who had spoken to them throughout their existence, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Surely this could be the last word—and all would be well.

But it wasn't. The Word came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. Israel was determined to have the last word. When the master sends his servants to collect his share of the fruit, they are beaten, stoned, and killed. Time and again, the tenants insist on the last word. Finally, they reject even the master's last gracious invitation. They believe they have the last word by killing the son, claiming the vineyard as their own. This is the ongoing tragedy of Israel: killing the Lord's prophets and finally killing Jesus the Son, the promised Messiah.

Not just Israel, but people of every time and place are all too often determined to have the last word. Doesn't that desire of ours to have the last word show up in our silent communication with God too? “Yes, Lord,

I know what you say in your Sixth Commandment, but we're really in love." "Yes, Lord, you promise to provide everything I need, but until I'm sure that my finances are completely secure, I'm going to hold back on giving to You and others." "Yes, Lord, I know you love everyone and call us to forgive as You have forgiven us, but you can't really expect me to forgive what was done to *me!*" Hearing this, we must perceive that the Lord was also speaking about us.

Jesus *will* have the last word with His opponents. Jesus actually gives His enemies one more chance to speak. He asks, "what will the owner do to those tenants?" and they answer. But the answer that comes from their unrepentant hearts in fact speaks the last word of judgment on themselves. And Jesus still gets His own final word, a warning that the kingdom would be taken from them. There was nothing more to say, and His opponents know it. If we still try to excuse ourselves when God's Word condemns our sin we are rejecting the Cornerstone upon whom lasting life is built. Then there's really nothing we can say. We stand condemned.

But Jesus Himself is truly the Last Word—a forgiving Word that does produce fruit in its season. He quotes the Psalm used in our Introit: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" Jesus, the Stone, the Son, was rejected and killed. For tenants of all time He gave His life on the cross. But in that moment, He spoke the *last* word: "It is finished." The work that accomplished our forgiveness and eternal life was accomplished, completed.

Then His resurrection proved that death could not be the last word—for Him and for us. Instead, by his death and resurrection, Jesus offers the Kingdom to all who believe in Him.

So as God sent prophet after prophet to reconcile His people Israel to Himself, His Last Word, Christ, continues to be spoken to us. Preaching that clearly distinguishes law and gospel declares to us the Last Word, Christ. The Word with water in Holy Baptism brings to us what the Last Word, Christ, did on the cross. By the Word, the Lord's Table *is* the Last Word that delivers to us Christ's forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit works through these means of grace to deliver the blessings Christ earned for us by His perfect life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection.

And by faith in Christ, the Last Word, believers do bear fruit, returning to the Master His due. Believers will be known by the fruits they bear in the name of Jesus. They will stay connected to Him in faith by Word and Sacrament. That God-given connection enables the thankful response of producing fruit. The fruit of the Spirit will prosper in God's vineyard. By His empowering grace God's vineyard dwellers will produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control---fruit so needed in our world today.

In a world where no one seems to let anyone else have the final say, where all beliefs are given equal weight, where even bumper stickers demand we "COEXIST," Jesus does have the last word. It is a law word, but also a gospel invitation: Believe in Me and be saved. He tells us that he is the Stone that has become the cornerstone of God's eternal kingdom. As for us having the last word? Similar to the advice to husbands, we say, "Yes, Lord, I believe." After that, there's nothing left to say; Jesus finished it all on the cross. At His return on the Last Day He has the *last* Last Word. To those who rejected Him, it will be a simple, "Depart from Me." And they will go quietly, because the death and resurrection of Christ gives Him the last word to silence all opponents once and for all. But to we who believe, it will be: "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." To that we can only say "Alleluia! Thanks be to God!" Amen.