

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

Isaiah 40:8

The theme of this week is the "Word of the Lord". You should be familiar with this because every time after the prefect has done the daily reading he will say "This is the Word of the Lord" and the assembly will respond by saying "Thanks be to God". Yet what is so good about the Word of God that you have to respond in thanksgiving?

The phrase "word of God" appears often in the Bible and can have a slightly different meaning depending on the context and the Hebrew or Greek word used. In **John 1** *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". (v1) "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth."* (v14) Here, the Word refers to Jesus. He is the Word made flesh who lived among us, the Word incarnate.

In other contexts the "word of God" refers to the written message of God - the Holy Scriptures or the Bible. However, unlike other written texts we read in novels or literature, today's Reading tells us very clearly that God's word speaks directly to us and it is purposeful and powerful. For it is written in **Isaiah 55:10-11**,

10 *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,

11 *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.

As the rain waters the earth before going back, so the word of God will achieve what it intends to achieve. The hymn today is one that was often sung in church or assembly when I was young. It was written by Sir H. W. Baker in 1861. It is a beautiful song about the power of God's word. Being written about 150 years ago the hymn is full of archaic words that you may not be familiar with. Let me unpack the first three verses for you.

1. Lord, Thy Word abideth,
And our footsteps guideth;
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy receiveth.

The word "abideth" is the old form of the word "abide" which means "obey" as in "you have to abide by the rules of the club". In modern language the verse means "Lord, when we obey your word, you will guide our footsteps. Whoever believes the truth of your word will receive light and joy". In other words, the word of God leads us the way when we are confused and lost. The verse reminds me of a Bible verse that I had to recite during my Sunday school days. It is taken from **Psalms 119:105** "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*". However, you need to know that, when God leads us that His way may not necessarily be your way. This is because God's ways are different from our ways and God's thoughts are different from ours. Yet you can rest assured that He will provide the best way for you.

2. When our foes are near us,
Then Thy Word doth cheer us,

Word of consolation,
 Message of salvation.

The second verse is a lot easier. The word “foes” is an old-fashioned or formal word for “enemies”. In modern language the verse means “when our enemies are all around us, your Word encourages us because you promise to save us”. God’s word can comfort and console us when we are faced with difficulties or when we are despondent. Again, it reminds me of another verse from **Psalms 112**:

*¹I lift up my eyes to the mountains —
 where does my help come from?*

*²My help comes from the LORD,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.*

3. When the storms are o’er us,
 And dark clouds before us,
 Then its light directeth,
 And our way protecteth.

Finally, the third verse tells us that God’s word protects us when we are in great difficulties. It reminds me of the image of Jesus standing and rebuking the storm, saying “Peace, be still”. Another verse about God’s protection is from the famous Psalm 23:

Psalm 23:1-4 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

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As you grapple with various developmental issues such as your career choice, inter-personal relationships or relationships with the opposite sex; as you are feeling confused because you are at a crossroads not knowing what to do; as you begin to question the meaning of life, let God speak to you directly because the word of God is there to lead you, to comfort you and to protect you. To do this you need to read the Bible more often. If you do not have the habit of reading the Bible, I suggest that you start with Psalms or Proverbs from the Old Testament because they are a lot easier to read. An alternative is to recite verses from the Bible and I am hoping that the RS teachers will be asking their students to do this. By allowing God's word to speak directly to you, I hope you will find that God's word is truly alive and active, living and powerful.

Thank you.

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