*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**John 1:1-14** (EHV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. 4In him was[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+1%253A1-18&version=ESVUK;EHV;EXB;NIRV#fen-EHV-26041a)] life, and the life was the light of mankind. 5The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+1%253A1-18&version=ESVUK;EHV;EXB;NIRV#fen-EHV-26042b)] it.

6There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. 8He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

9The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. 11He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. 13They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.

14The Word became flesh and dwelled[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+1%253A1-18&version=ESVUK;EHV;EXB;NIRV#fen-EHV-26051c)] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15John testified about him. He cried out, “This was the one I spoke about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’” 16For[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+1%253A1-18&version=ESVUK;EHV;EXB;NIRV#fen-EHV-26053d)] out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. 17For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jn+1%253A1-18&version=ESVUK;EHV;EXB;NIRV#fen-EHV-26055e)] who is close to the Father’s side, has made him known.

**Footnotes:**

1. Some witnesses to the text read *is*. (“Witnesses to the text” mentioned in footnotes may include Greek manuscripts, lectionaries, translations, and quotations in the church fathers.)
2. Or *grasped*
3. Literally *tented*
4. Some witnesses to the text read *And.*
5. Some witnesses to the text read *The only-begotten God.*

*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may trust in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.*

There’s a statement which suggests: ‘You’re only as good as your word’.

But, what does it mean to be ‘only as good as your word’?

Does it mean you’re only a good person if you’re good at pronouncing your words correctly?

Does it mean you’re only a good person if you use words good?

Does it mean the more words you use, the better you are?

Does it mean only those who speak words are any good, so therefore those who talk a lot are the only ones who are truly good?

I don’t believe any of these suggestions are correct.

Instead, the saying implies you’re only a good person if you keep true to your word. This means it’s not just about your words (however well-chosen they may be), but your actions need to match the words you speak in order to prove your words are reliable and trustworthy. Your words and actions need to agree with each other.

This means if your actions match your words, you’re the type of person people will want to know and trust. On the other hand, if your actions don’t match your words, then you’re dishonest, untrustworthy, and unreliable.

So, understanding you’re only as good as your word, just how good are you?

Do you always keep your word without exception, meaning, when you promise something; you’ll *always* carry it out, no matter what? Or do you find yourself making up excuses for failed pledges and for letting people down?

Do you always speak the truth, or are you happy to tell lies, even those seemingly ‘harmless’ white lies which still aren’t the truth? But if you’re not telling the whole truth (and nothing but the truth), are you still trustworthy?

Knowing how hurtful words can be, are your words sometimes filled with anger, put-downs, abuse, sexual innuendos, and sarcasm? Do you speak in such a way you always build people up, encourage, bless, praise, and give hope, or do you sometimes speak words which tear down, breed doubt, disapprove, blame, excuse, criticise and are filled with hatred?

If you’re only as good as your words, what good do you possibly hope to achieve by all those negative, untrue, trivial, and evil words you speak?

Have your words negatively affected your relationships with those around you? Have you betrayed those who close to you? Have you belittled them, misrepresented them, or judged them unfairly?

As you consider your words and the effects of your words, do you regret the words you chose? Do you regret the words you left unsaid? If you had to eat your words, would they always be sweet, or would you choke on them?

Or putting it another way (as good little Lutherans) by using the explanation to the 8th Commandment as a tool of diagnosis, have you told lies about your neighbours, betrayed or slandered them, or sought to destroy their reputations? Or have you *always* come to people’s defence, spoken well of people, and interpreted *everything* they do in the best possible light?

If you’re only as good as your word, then just how good are you based on your words and your associated actions?

Well, if you’re anything like me, you’re no good. I too have trouble keeping my word, and sarcasm seems to get the better of me all too often. I too have what I call ‘verbal diarrhoea’ which shouldn’t come out of my mouth. Without even taking my actions into consideration, my words condemn me. Like it or not, the truth is your words condemn you too.

It doesn’t matter what excuses you or I can come up with. According to God, anything less than 100% pure, holy, innocent and righteous words and actions are not good enough.

This means you and I stand condemned by God and can all agree with the words St Paul says in his letter to the Romans (7:18-19, 24-25a):

*‘For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.*

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!’*

Which brings me to today’s text.

If you’re only as good as your word (and your accompanying actions), then its interesting St John begins his gospel account with the Word.

But this Word isn’t just any word. This Word isn’t like our words. This Word matched perfectly with its actions. This Word was at the beginning of Creation. This Word spoke Creation into being. This Word says what he does and does what he says. This Word can be trusted. This Word is our only beacon of light, life, hope, and truth in a world of darkness, death, chaos and lies.

It would seem if you’re only as good as your word and this Word is truly good, then everyone would want to know and trust this Word, but this isn’t what happened. Even the ones who should have recognised this Word didn’t trust this Word. His own people who longed for the coming of this Word rejected him.

Yet the good news is that those who *do* trust this Word are given the extraordinary privilege to become children of God.

Imagine that! This is more than just more words. This is also an action. Remember, the words and actions of God always go together. They’re eternally true, which means any other word or action on earth isn’t eternal.

What’s more, is this Word became flesh. The Word who speaks truth, the Word who does what he says, the Word who keeps all his promises, and the Word who is as good as his word, came to our human race in human flesh!

This means the God who created everything in all its majesty and wonder became vulnerable and helpless. The God who brought life into being is now killable. In fact, this is why he came among us – the eternal Word came to die for those who aren’t true to their word.

He did this, not because you or I deserve it, because we’re not as redeemable and loveable as we think. It’s simply because God’s true to his word. He’s faithful to you and me because of who he is and says. He’s faithful and loving to you and me because that’s what he says and does.

Therefore, in Jesus we encounter the Word of God himself in the form of a human being who is actually as good as his word because this Word (who is Jesus) is also God who does what he says and says what he does.

This is the Jesus St Paul talks about and thanks God for – the Word who became flesh; the God who came to us as a human to speak and act in truth and love in order to forgive and grant eternal life to you and me through faith. This is the One we thank and praise with the same lips which struggle to speak and perform the truth.

This is the God St John and other witnesses saw. They bear witness to the truth of Jesus’ words and life and work. They bear witness Jesus is as good as his word because he is the eternal Word of God made human flesh. They bear witness to the grace and truth which came through the birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – God’s Word made flesh.

Not only this, but the whole Church continues to bear witness to the Word made flesh in such a way where Jesus’ words still have power to do exactly as they say.

For example, the Church continues to fulfil Jesus’ Word by doing what he tells us to do. This means we make disciples of Jesus by baptising people in the holy name of God and teaching them God’s Word which they can trust with their very lives. Through faith baptised people like you become children of God who are forgiven for all your unholy words and actions.

The Church also continues to fulfil Jesus’ words to ‘do this’, which is to celebrate the feast of his own body and blood given and shed, for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. As you come to eat and drink the Word made flesh and blood, you come believing the truth of your own sinfulness and your need for salvation because you’re not as good as your word.

But you also come believing you receive exactly what Jesus offers you because Jesus’ word does exactly as he says. Jesus is as good as his word in that he truly gives you his body and blood in a special way to reassure you of his love and forgiveness, which in turn also strengthens your faith in him.

You receive his body and blood to cleanse and purify unholy mouths and bodies. As Jesus’ body and blood enters your blood stream, Jesus’ own nature is to dwell in you and motivate your words and actions. But of course, you know by now you’ll quickly fail again, and so you’ll come back again next week to receive his forgiveness and cleansing once more.

Even his words of forgiveness spoken through his chosen representatives are true and trustworthy, after all, since the Word became flesh after being borne by a human mother, why can't his words of grace, mercy, forgiveness and cleansing also be borne by humans? Jesus is as good as his word, even when others speak his word on his behalf.

God is truly as good as his word, and his Word was made flesh and lived among us. The Word made flesh came to save people like you and me because we’re not as good as our word. In response to all of God’s gracious good words and actions, we praise God his Word still lives and does exactly what he says because his Word is true and trustworthy.

So no, none of us are as good as our word, but we trust in the One who is. The Word of God has come among us full of grace and truth in order to fulfil everything written about him so that you and I might become God’s children through faith, with all the heavenly privileges – not because we’re worthy of this, but simply because of the promise of God – and God’s as good as his word.

*In this way, may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds as you trust in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig

Bethlehem, Wagga Wagga

2nd Sunday after Christmas

5th January 2020