



## CHRISTMAS 2

Jan. 4, 2026

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

**THE LESSONS:** Jeremiah 31:7-14;  
Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14;  
John (1-9), 10-18

**THE SERMON:** "Actions Speak  
Louder..."

**Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **INTRODUCTION: When God Speaks: Are We Tuning In?**

Do any of you remember this classic commercial from the 70s and 80s? A crowded, noisy room—maybe a restaurant or a busy street—suddenly dead silence. Two people are leaning in, and one whispers, "Well, my broker is E.F. Hutton, and E.F. Hutton says..." The tag line was iconic: "When E.F. Hutton speaks, people listen." It was a brilliant marketing campaign. It suggested that this company had such authority, such inside knowledge, that their words could stop a room. But here is the irony: I didn't even remember the name of that company and had to Google that company. In the 80s, we thought they were a permanent fixture of the financial world. But, today, E.F. Hutton vanished into a series of mergers and is now just a footnote in the history of Morgan Stanley. We thought their voice would always matter.

We live in a world of loud voices—pundits, influencers, and "experts"—all vying for that E.F. Hutton moment. But today, I'm going to talk about a voice that doesn't just stop a room, but changes a lives. I want to talk about what happens when God speaks, and more importantly, when we listen and don't have our fingers in our ears.

### **Jeremiah 31:7-14: The Prophet Nobody Heard**

Jeremiah is often called the "Weeping Prophet," and for good reason. For 29 chapters, Jeremiah spoke the truth to power. He pleaded, he scolded, he warned Israel: "Turn back to God, or the walls are coming down!" And do you know what happened? **Nobody listened.** They threw him in a cistern. They mocked him. And eventually, the

Babylonians arrived, the walls fell, and the people were dragged off into exile. Imagine being Jeremiah. You've spent your life being God's megaphone, and the only response you get is static. But then, in Jeremiah 31, the tone shifts. In the middle of the dark night of exile, God speaks a new word. He says, "I am going to bring them (the exiles) from the north... I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path... He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps a flock."

Here is the challenge as we enter this new year: When God spoke that promise, the people were still in chains. Because God didn't act *immediately*, they went right back to not listening. They didn't realize that God's clock doesn't run on our microwave-speed expectations. It took 70 years, but God's word didn't fail. He spoke, and eventually, the chains broke. With this new year, despite the broken promises of our politicians, despite all the bad news on TV, God will prevail. God's word will not fail. God is with us.

### **Psalm 147:12-20: The Sound of Gratitude**

When we read Psalm 147, what did you imagine the setting to be - a beautiful, comfortable temple? No, it was likely written after the people returned from that exile. They were looking at the charred remains of Jerusalem, trying to rebuild the gates. The Psalmist is trying to wake the people up! He's saying, "Look! God sends out his word and the snow melts! He speaks and the wind blows! He gave you His laws!"

The great reformer Martin Luther had a biting commentary on this Psalm. He basically said it's a "great shame" that we have to be goaded into giving thanks. He compared us to " sluggards" or "sleepyheads" who have to be shaken awake to notice that the sun came up and our lungs are working. Luther's point was simple: We shouldn't need a professional choir or a miracle to remind us to praise God. The gifts themselves—the air, the water, the bread and wine, the grace—should be the "E.F. Hutton" moments that stop us in our tracks. We should stop and listen when God speaks. If we only listen to God when he's shouting in a thunderstorm, we're going to miss the beauty of the whisper in the sunrise.

## **John (1-9),10-18: The Word Becomes a Person**

If you really want to understand the power of God's voice, you have to look at the Gospel of John. John doesn't start with a baby in a manger; he starts with a "Word." "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh and lived among us." But, the way John said this makes us think about creation. God is doing something new in Jesus.

In the Hebrew mind, a "word" wasn't just a vibration in the air. A word was an *action*. When God said "Light," there was light. When God speaks in Jesus, things *happen*. In Jesus, God's "Word" meant the blind saw, the lame walked, and the dead stood up. But even then—even when the Word was standing right in front of them—people didn't listen.

Think about the Cross. God was speaking the most powerful sentence in human history: "I love you this much," as Jesus spread out his arms on the Cross. And what was the world doing? The soldiers were gambling for his clothes. The crowds were shouting insults. They were literally watching God's Word in action and they were ignoring what was right in front of them. Except for one person. One Roman Centurion looked up at the dying man and finally "listened" with his eyes. He whispered, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

## **Ephesians 1:3-14: The Hard-Headed Listener**

And, of course, there's the Apostle Paul. I love Paul because I identify with him. Paul was hard-headed. He was stubborn. He was so sure he was right that he literally hunted down Christians.

God didn't just whisper to Paul; He had to knock him off his high horse. He had to blind him to get his attention. I think many of us are like that. I know I've been knocked off my high horse two or three times in my life before I finally shut up and listened.

Paul heard the message: God has a plan to gather up *all* things in Christ. Not just the "good" people. Not just the "religious" people. But the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the Gentiles—the people who thought they were outside the reach of God's voice.

## **The Challenge: Becoming a Living Word**

So, what does this mean for us in 2026? Pope Francis said something that haunts me. He said he prefers a Church that is "**bruised, hurting,**

**and dirty”** because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church that is "unhealthy from being confined and clinging to its own security.” He was saying that we have to stop just *saying* words and start *being* the Word.

Think about it: If you tell someone "God loves you" while you're walking past them while they're struggling, those are just words. But if you feed them, if you sit with them in their grief, if you offer a hand to the "bruised and dirty," then the Word has become flesh again. That's why I believe in the ministry of Cultivate Initiatives. They speak through action. They offer a hand up, instead of a handout.

**When the Church speaks, does the world listen?** Maybe they don't listen because, when Christians say "We love you," those outsiders really don't see God's love in our actions. But, God is still speaking. He is saying, "I am here. I am redeeming. I am making all things new." The question isn't whether God is speaking; the question is: **Are Christians speaking God's language of love to a hurting world?**

Our New Year challenge is not to look for God in a sermon or a book. Look for the "Word" in the face of your neighbor. Be a living word of grace to someone who feels forgotten. Because when we become the hands and feet of Jesus, people don't just hear the Gospel—they experience it. And when people see the love of God in action, believe me... they will listen. Jesus said that the harvest is plenty but the workers are few. But, you and I have seen the love of God! So, God is challenging us to be God's hands to do God's work. Have we heard the people cry? Do we feel the people's pain? Will we tend the poor and lame? God is calling us to make their darkness bright and bring God's light to them. Whom shall God send? And, may our answer be our hymn today, Here I Am, Lord. I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, as you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart. So, let us answer God's challenge as we sing, Hymn 574, Here I am, Lord! Send Me!