

“WORDS”

AUG. 20, 2017

Isaiah 56:1-8

Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. ²Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil.

³Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people”; and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.” ⁴For thus says the LORD: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. ⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant— ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. ⁸Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

11:1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 11:2a God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 11:29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 11:30 Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, 11:31 so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. 1:32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Matthew 15: 20-28

¹⁰Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" ¹³He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

15:21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 15:22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 15:23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 15:24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 15:25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 15:26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 15:27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Words. We know words. We are inundated with words from the time we rise up and flip on the perfunctory morning program of choice until the sleep timer cuts off the blessed word mill in the night. Words. Spoken happily, sadly, begrudgingly, willingly, incessantly, pedantically, timidly, powerfully, brashly, shyly, loudly, softly, mumbled, distinctly, angrily, calmly, cautiously, recklessly, reservedly, pointedly, helpfully, negatively, positively, hatefully, lovingly. Words of glorious praise, words of horrible obscenity. Words that bridge the gap between the human and the divine, and words that expose the depths of evil. Words that are meant to heal and words that are meant to destroy.

You get the idea. Words. Those people who count things because they have nothing better to do say that an average person will speak somewhere between 13 and 20 thousand words a day. A quiet person will speak less than ten thousand and we probably know some people who pass fifty thousand around noon. On the flip side they say the average person will hear tens of thousands, especially if you watch much t.v. Talk and news shows may have close to 10K words in an hour. That's a lot of words.

Our gospel lesson for today would certainly lead us to a discussion about words and you probably fear not so much a sermon on words, but a stern lecture, using words of counsel and warning and some part scolding about how we use words. About what is, in actuality the defiling element – what goes in or what comes out. Past, rather wordy sermons on these words have challenged

us in how we use our words. How we pepper our language with cheap words. With cheap words. How we use words differently on Sunday at church than we do when we're at work or at home or on the golf course or at a sporting event. We won't tolerate improper, foul, profane, obscene or hurtful words from our children, but we tolerate them, almost with relish from the leaders of our nation. We all know what harm words can do. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me," is a ridiculously hurtful myth. Words do harm. Words can incite riot, violence and war. Unchecked rhetoric is as dangerous as a loaded gun.

We've all used words that have harmed another, intentionally or not. Words we wish we could take back, words said purposefully or in the heat of a moment that have caused damage – sometime irreparable damage. We all know sometimes we should just shut up. Which were, of course, two words put together many of us in our childhood were told never to say to another, but in truth, shutting up, not speaking until *well after thinking* may just save doing harm. But in our anti-social world of social media we text, tweet, email, comment and twitter without thought or conscience.

Words are certainly a huge part of the national discussion these days, But then, haven't they always been? Words, whether they be well thought out or terribly ill advised have effect. It does seem that all reasonable filters for what is said and how words are spoken have been stripped away as if some

sort of permission to express oneself is being considered as some sort of divine right or at least constitutionally protected right. In a vacuum this may not seem to be all that serious. But words, all too often, lead to actions. And negative, hateful, hurtful, profane and violent words find expression in events like Charlottesville. They sully the heart twist the minds and hearts of the innocent until with weapon in hand they become killing machines, mad bombers, and operators of vehicles as implements of death. All because of words.

Jesus is for us today, just as he was for his disciples, our greatest teacher, in everything, but also in the use and importance of our words. Very carefully chosen and thought out words. One of his favorite methods was the seemingly innocuous question. In response to a report from his disciples that the Pharisees were upset that his disciples didn't wash their hands before they ate – a definite violation of dietary law – Jesus asks, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

Then in a stroke of genius, Matthew pairs Jesus words with a living illustration. Using Jesus' own words as the example. Here's a woman with a

list of problems that put her in a terrible desperate predicament. She's female, she's Canaanite, she's got a sick daughter who is dying, and the only place she has left to express her dilemma is at the table of a Rabbi. It's o.k. we think, this rabbi is Jesus. Jesus loves everybody. Jesus says, "who is your neighbor?" and then not only tells us who but that we are to love them as ourselves. Jesus says love your enemies. But Jesus answers, sounding a lot like, well anyone who's the opposite of Jesus, words you might see on the placard of an angry mob, or hear coming from the megaphone of a maniacal racist. He comes forth with some very hurtful harsh and exclusionary words. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Woe. Jeez. Jesus.

And the woman, who by the rules of public engagement in that culture shouldn't be speaking to Jesus at all, calmly responds respectfully, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus, thank you Jesus, shows back up and answers her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Now raise your hand if you think Jesus didn't know exactly what he was saying and doing. With Pharisaical eyes boring into him. With racist, misogynist and dismissive ears listening to him. Jesus seizes the moment and allows action to trump words.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to total commitment to Jesus Christ. That commitment calls us to a heightened awareness of who he is and what he would have us to do...and to say. If we are going to bear upon ourselves the name Christian, we are called to a higher standard. No one ever said it would be easy. To follow Jesus Christ is to commit to knowing who he is and doing our best to live up to what he says for us to do.

Words are vital. If we're going to learn anything at all from Jesus today we should know that the power of words is not just in the hurt. The true God given power of words is just the opposite. Words have tremendous power to build up, to lift the human spirit, to lead to actions that saves and does not destroy. Words can make a plain person someone extraordinary. Words can heal bruises and brawls; words can soothe the agitated temper. Words can give hope to the despondent. Our words can point the way to God. We are called to know the one who we are to follow and to live as he calls us to live. To use our words...and have the wisdom not to...

If, we could get a handle on our words....maybe our actions could follow....If we really meant what we said.... Who knows what the outcome might be? Mornin', how ya doin?, how are you?, good, nice, sure, why not?, you look great, beautiful, fine, marvelous, super, fantastic, stupendous, excellent, thanks, you are doing a great job, sorry, that's a shame, so sad, don't worry, it'll be o.k., you'll be all right, be happy, glad, exuberant, ecstatic,

joy, joyful, joyous, praise, celebrate, embrace, sing, humor, bounty, blessing,
thanks, appreciation, consecration, admiration, adoration, adulation,
affirmation, imagination, inspiration, infatuation, invitation, innocence,
involvement, feed, sustain, enough, rescue, excellence, life, hope, peace, God,
oh God, our God, gospel, good news, cross, bread, cup, honor, glory, humility,
light, calm, comfort, hope, peace, grace, love, God bless you.....

Now I know it seems like I've just thrown a day's worth of words at you.
But according to word count it's only about 1470. At any rate. Enough said.
Now it's time to get out there and do the words. Love, care, forgive, serve,
play, pray, be kind, be nice.... Listen to the Word, Jesus, and follow him...