

Sermon: The Power of Words

Scripture: Psalm 103:8-14; 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

Ash Wednesday

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Psalm 103:8-14

Today's first Scripture reading comes from Psalm 103: 8-14. It is one of David's psalters, extoling God. Generally known for its opening phrase, "Bless the Lord, O my soul... bless his holy name," David highlights the great attributes of God and remind all of us of our humble origin. Listen now to the Word of the Lord.

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

*The Lord will not always accuse,
nor will the Lord keep the Lord's anger forever.*

The Lord does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

*For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is the Lord's steadfast love toward those who fear the Lord;*

as far as the east is from the west,
so far the Lord removes our transgressions from us.

*As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear the Lord.*

For the Lord knows how we were made;
the Lord remembers that we are dust.

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

Our second Scripture reading comes from 1 Corinthians 2:1-13.

In this Epistle to people in Corinth, Paul encourages them and shares with them the power and wisdom that comes through the Spirit of God. As we begin our Lenten journey to get closer to the Lord, let us hear how God is nearer to us than we think. Listen to the Word of the Lord.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love God”—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

This is the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God, Amen.

Let us pray. Lord we are here together to start our journey to the cross, to get a glimpse of how much you bore for us, to understand the depth of your love for us that you would indeed make your own journey knowing what is ahead. Lord, as we gather on the starting line, may your Word encourage us, empower us, and strengthen us to grow closer to you. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

I would like to start tonight as I often begin our youth group gatherings with a question. Here is a riddle:

We hurt without moving. We poison without touching. We bear the truth and the lies. We are not to be judged by our size. What are we?

The answer is **words**.

Words are powerful. Depending how one uses it, it is one of the deadliest powers that God had given to all of us. We all need to remember, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. God used the spoken words to create the world. "Let there be light"; and there was light... "let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters..." and it was so. God called the dome Sky. Then God created us, humans, in God's image and gave us the ability to speak, to allow us to have access to the power of words.

More often than not, we use these words for granted, using them simply as a means of delivering one's thoughts to someone else. Sometimes with carelessness, we unintentionally hurt others. Sometimes in frustration or in anger, we say smallest words that causes deep gauges that we wish we can take back.

To whom much has been given, much will be required.

But if we intentionally used our words for expression of affection, to motivate, to encourage, to build someone up, the same mighty power of word takes hold.

Many of you must be thinking that simply saying the good things can be done by people with good hearts. You are correct. But to whom much has been given, much will be required. We are people who confess that Jesus is our Savior and trust that God's Spirit is working around us and within us. As Paul shares in his letter to Corinth, we have an obligation to share God's love through our words which the Spirit of God will lead us. That means that we need to not only speak it but live out Godly attributes in our lives.

As many of you already know, the season of Lent is 40 days + 6 Sundays that are set aside before Easter as an opportunity to reconnect with God in specific ways. Some practice Lenten commitment, which means they give up something for Lent. Long ago, Christians gave up meat, fish, eggs, and other things for Lent. Some carry on such tradition today, while others give up things more modern that are used frequently in their lives. Everyone's milage might differ but I have surrendered coffee, soda, social media, video/computer games, and fast food in the years past, just not all at once. Surprisingly, it was video games that was the easiest to keep the commitment, and coffee that was hardest to keep. I must

have kept failing in that commitment every couple of days or so. It did not matter if I fully succeeded throughout 46 days or only was able to do one, what matters is knowing that God loves us regardless and learning to keep God in our hearts and thoughts as much as we can, as we face our reminder objects that we gave up through Lent.

But this year, I would like to invite Westminster to join me in a Lenten commitment that does not require giving up something, but rather add something during this season. For some, it might be using the power of words to pray for someone each day. It could mean that you write a daily card to different people sharing with them that they are being remembered and loved during what might be a lonely and distant COVID season. It might be a simple offering of kind words that lifts up and encourage others a few times a day. And most importantly, do not just stop there. See where the Spirit of God lead you after you have done your task for the day and follow it!

As our Lenten Scripture verse reminds us on the back of the bookmark – “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” Let the Word become embodied in us that the love of God and the love that we have for one another at Westminster will grow and bring warmth to our souls which will guard us from the winter chill outside. Amen.