

Sunday, September 12, 2021

Proverbs 1:20-33 James 3:1-12, Mark 8:31-38

“The Power of Words”

Words, words and more words—but how do we understand them and put them into action? This is the focus of our fall series which is about what we say and how we communicate Christ’s message of love to others. Today we reflect on the power of words that is how every day words whether spoken, written, sung, texted, emailed, or shared in some form impacts our lives. How is it that when we share our ideas with another person may change another’s viewpoint and add to their life experience. In any given minute, there are millions of words shared because people are connecting with others. Sometimes messages are clear but often miscommunication occurs when words shared are not clearly pronounced or there is misunderstanding of meaning. An example of this is when we use the words few, couple, several or many. Just how many things are we talking about? To be clear one might remember the following:

A thing is just one thing; and a couple things is two.

And if you have three things, then you say you have a few.

You start to say there’s several after you have four

and keep on saying several even after you have more.

But at some point you’ll have many and that’s the word to choose,

when you have so many things that there’s no other word to use.

We do have an expression that a picture is worth a thousand words, but with words, images come alive with emotion, experiences of the past and the creation of memories. Just imagine a beach scene—for some of you the beach is crowded with sunbathers and people in the water. For others the beach is empty as the sun sets. Still others might think of the beach and a fire pit where friends are gathered and singing songs. The image is there but the words share the emotion. Words make a difference to what is remembered and these might be both hurtful and helpful.

The book of Proverbs is the recorded statements of King Solomon of Israel and also David’s son who taught the people regarding wisdom and instruction. He wanted his people to listen to his words so that they would grow in knowledge and learn about God. In our passage today, Solomon describes wisdom as a person crying out loud on the street to anyone who might listen to her. People were ignoring wisdom for a long time but as she cries in the street she knows that at some time, all will seek her. In times of chaos, panic, distress and anguish those in need will seek wisdom, however they will not be able to receive it. By this, Solomon states that what we must do then, is listen, be secure in learning and listen so that we will have knowledge to be able to live

at ease without the dread of uncertainty. For if we truly seek wisdom, we will find the knowledge of God.

What kind of wisdom are you seeking? As we begin this new academic year we know that many children and youth are excited about being back to school because of their friendships. They will also be tasked with learning many new skills and concepts and to do so with others. As adults we often encourage others to develop new skills and ideas but what about you? What are you interested in learning? Life is filled with learning opportunities- whether it is through reading a book, trying a new craft or even discovering something while walking. The world is opening up again to possible places where you can explore. Just what are you seeking to learn and understand about the world which God made? How are you continuing to live as a lifelong learner- no matter how old you are!

These past 18 months have taught us a great many things when it comes to possible ways of learning and acquiring knowledge. But one of the key things we are called to do as followers or believers in God is to draw closer to Him through reading the Bible and praying on the words, the stories and the teachings. To truly read, listen and understand what Jesus did for us is key to our knowledge of God. In Mark 8 Jesus asked his disciples about what the people on the streets where they had walked thought about him, who they thought he might be and what his purpose was on earth. The disciples answered that some people thought he was John the Baptist, others Elijah and still others thought he was one of the prophets. The reality of the word on the street was that they really did not know who Jesus was or from where he came.

Jesus then stops walking, looks at the disciples in their eyes and then looking at Peter he says, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

But what does this word mean? messiah- Christ, it is defined as 'the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible'. The one who came to earth to redeem and save His people from their sins. Jesus Christ—it is not a name but a title given to the Son of Man, the son of God, the Word (Big w) of God made flesh. But who is Jesus? Jesus is all of these. And it is Jesus who taught his disciples and all who would listen to him about what would occur. He told them that he would experience great suffering, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes in the synagogues and temples. He would then be killed and after three days rise again. Jesus told this to his disciples "quite openly".

Jesus was teaching the disciples about how his purpose would be fulfilled. That is how he would enable people to be reconciled with God the Father, through his death and resurrection. But Peter rebuked him for what he was saying. Jesus in turn rebuked back and called out to the crowd which had now gathered around them. He then spoke directly- no parables, no healings, no special miracles but words. "If any want to

become my followers: this is what you need to do – deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.”

What did Jesus mean with these words? Was he telling the crowd how he was going to die- on the cross without them knowing? Was he giving further instructions about what it would mean to truly follow Him and believe in Him? Just what did he mean?

Jesus states that to truly follow him there are three requirements.

1) deny oneself- give up something that you would want for yourself. What would/ do you give up? What do you consider something in your life right now that you think and feel you should/ ought to give up for the sake of learning/ growing or acquiring knowledge?

2) take up your cross- what crosses do you bear? Are you troubled- physically, emotionally, mentally, intellectually, or spiritually? What weighs you down in your life—your whole life? intellectually—maybe there is anxiety, stress over uncertainty of what is to come; Maybe your mental health is not enabling you to focus on day to day activities; Or maybe you are emotionally grieving loss(es) in your life; and maybe you are worried about medical tests for your physical well being; or spiritually you are just not sure where your relationship with God Jesus and Spirit really lies because in these last few weeks and months you might have moved closer to God or even fallen away in faith because of the events tragedies and situations in the world. But what are you going to take to Christ? What crosses are you carrying? Are you going to take all of this and follow Jesus to where he received all of them for your sake and mine?

3) Jesus then said, "Follow me." Two words with easy instructions- follow me. Not you go ahead and I'll follow you—but follow me. Let Jesus lead and you follow; go where he leads you; trust him and follow.

These are powerful words simply put. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow. If you call Jesus your Messiah/ Christ/ Saviour—what are the words you are saying, written, spoken, signed or embodied or acted out really mean? How will these be different because of our profession of faith. Are you a follower of the “the Word made flesh” in Jesus Christ?

In James we read, "If any of you is lacking in wisdom ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly and it will be given you. But ask in faith- not doubt." Ask for wisdom in faith. God will give you wisdom. Have you ever asked for wisdom- that is clarity understanding, knowledge of something you were studying? Did you receive it? And did you acknowledge that this came from God?

How easy it is to dismiss from where our knowledge comes. How easy it is to say I did it alone, I studied it well. But the reality is God gave you the abilities to learn and impart wisdom in you because you had faith. We may question and ask for explanations while learning, but doubting no. For if we doubt, we should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

The Power of words. God brought the world into existence by speaking, "Let there be... and it occurred. We can be clear in our statement of numbers by saying that there are a couple, few, several, many ways to express our thoughts. But the power of words grows within us when we ask for wisdom in faith. We might say we believe, but it is in our unbelief that God will teach us and show us Christ. It is through Jesus' call to follow him, that we will grow in learning more about him. But are we willing? Are we hearing the power of Christ's words? Deny, take up the cross, and follow? Or are we merely letting them flow away. This is the choice we must make. This is the power of words as we believe in the Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Holy and wonderful God we hear the words of Jesus to follow but we know that this means we need to give our lives to him, to carry our burdens as we meet him and to boldly follow in faith. Help us to understand these words filled with faith and hope. Show us who we are as people of your Word. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.