

## Living the Faith of Christ 4 Pentecost A

Words have power in them. More power than what we think. What we hear each Sunday is the teaching of the prophets and our Savior Jesus Christ. As Christians we believe Jesus word is unlike any human word or teaching. His word is the power and wisdom of God. Why is it that the power and wisdom of God is not conveyed by the scriptures we read from in our bulletins and in our Bibles? We hear God's words through human ears and by human voice that reads His word to us. But what we hear may be different than what we understand. The gift of the Holy Spirit, our teacher and guide through God's teaching helps us live the faith of Jesus Christ. So what can we do about understanding what we read and hear?

I use the invention of the telegraph to help us understand the link between words on the pages of our Bibles with those thoughts carrying God's message of truth to our minds and spirit.

The theory behind sound and voice being carried and transferred along wires was simple in its explanation. Back in its time the telegraph used a tapping device to transmit a code along hundreds of miles of wires that could then be deciphered for its meaning at the receiving end. "Morse Code" named for its inventor, was a series of dashes and dots that represented each letter of the alphabet. Schools were set up to teach this code and Signals Analysts in the military are still learning it. For you and I Morse Code may be nothing more than unintelligible sounds. It takes a trained code breaker to know the meaning of the code and translate it into a message that we can use.

Since the King James Bible was published in 1611 a number of translations and paraphrases have been written. I remember when The Living Bible was published in 1971 by Kenneth Taylor. It is a paraphrase rather than a translation from Hebrew and Greek. According to the online encyclopedia, Wikepedia, "Taylor never intended ... (it to be) an aid to serious, scholarly study, but rather to put the basic truths of the Bible in language which could readily be understood by the typical reader without a theological or linguistic background." The Message, by Eugene Peterson, also a paraphrase, was written in the same spirit as the original scripture was written in the street languages of their day.

We need to hold on to the basic truths of God's word. For Thomas Aquinas, Faith is not merely your holding on to God, it is God holding on to you. He will not let you go! The Living Bible and The Message connect with many people the deeper meaning of what they hear and read. The word of God takes hold of them in a way that speaks to them today. Our teachers here at Trinity seek to do that with our children, teens and adults. When that happens something mysterious occurs when the words of Holy Scripture are heard and then translated into our understanding.

The word mystery in scripture means "secret" or "hidden." Understanding scripture or its message can be a mysterious undertaking because the will of God and teaching of Jesus is not always evident but hidden. One person can hear lessons from the words read or preached and it means nothing. One can come to a new understanding of God and faith as a journey when studied. Meaning and understanding just does not happen or spring from hearing the words. Faith as given by the Holy Spirit is the gift we receive to understand. Faith is the ability to believe in and hope in what is mystery or hidden to the rest of the world. Faith allows us to hear the words for ourselves and translate them into meaning for our lives. According to the measure of faith given to each one of us understanding is received and that understanding is different for each person. I recall reading the Spiritual Formation Inquiries over the last two weeks and marveling how your faith has enriched your knowledge and love of God in so many different ways. Each of you hears God speaking – some in gentle strokes, a few directly, many through their prayers and so many more when we commune together around His table.

The New Testament writings speak of the mystery hidden by God from the ages only to be revealed in His son Jesus. Jesus in his ministry did not always intend to be understood by everyone. To so many he was just another rabbi. That was evident by his teaching method, primarily by story, such as parables that contained hidden messages. Jesus taught this way to use the ordinary to draw the listener inward and bring out spiritual truth. It was a constant complaint that the disciples did not always get the message Jesus was giving. At his farewell, they asked him to speak plainly and simply so they could get his meaning. After he had risen it was the stories that the hidden Jesus told Cleopas and his companion on the Emmaus walk in Luke 24. The words Jesus taught them burned in

their hearts but it was not until he broke bread with them that the eyes of the two disciples were opened. Is it not this mystery that attracts us to the Christian faith? It is God hidden in the bread that allows our faith to understand and see Him.

It takes the gift of faith seeking understanding to make sense of all these lessons we learn in life. Thank God that he gives some kind of faith to everyone to match their particular gift whether they see God through music, art, science, numbers, psychology or theology, it is this faith that connects the dots so we can make sense of how God is communicating to each of us. And it is my hope that each sabbath you will go away with a sense that God's words tingle if not set you on fire.

Like the old telegraph operator, faith connects the word of God we hear to our minds and spirits that we might understand God's message. So the prophet of the law in our first lesson tells his people to bind the words on their hands, and on their foreheads, talking about faith stories with their children when walking and while at home. The reminder of God's word was written on their doorposts and gates so they would never forget that abundant and eternal life depended on a living faith in God's commandments. Faithful Jewish people today have tiny scrolls of scripture in boxes called Mezuzah and nail these boxes to their doorposts and on their gates. Whenever they see the box they will touch it or kiss it to remind themselves of God's promises to His people.

Jesus compared acting on his words to building one's house on rock. To be foolish enough not to listen and act on his words, is the same as building a house by a sinkhole in California or on the shore of the rising Rock River. What we build our lives on does matter. What we fill our minds with does affect us. We don't always know where to build our lives. Do we know what sand is and what rock is? We go from religion to religion and from church to church thinking that this one is going to answer all our questions. We make it so hard for ourselves and while Jesus came to set us free from wandering from God he also lets us go until we find our way back home.

Faith, St Paul wrote later, in Romans chapter 10:8,9 is as easy as speaking. He quotes Deuteronomy 30:14, "the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This faith is a gift of God. The scripture teaches that all

have this gift but some choose not to open this gift. In Romans 1:16, St Paul writes, "...It is the power of God to everyone, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (I have other references: Luke 13:5, John 3:16, John 10:27,28).

It would be unjust and not in keeping with the righteousness of God to withhold the one gift that could release his power for life to all people. The gift of faith is given for one reason. It is to release God's power of salvation for living by faith.

God's salvation is not for escaping the fires of hell! That makes it much too cheap to say that Jesus died so we could just escape judgment. God's salvation is given freely so we can live by faith. To live by faith is to become like his Son: to live by His righteousness, His goodness, His love and not a counterfeit. That is the reason we are saved. Not to live by faith is a living hell. And too many build their lives on sand over and over again. I am concerned that what you get on Sunday is good building material and not sand. I pray God will keep me faithful to His work.

I understand why Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is God's power hidden in His gospel that has come, and is near us and is actually in our mouth waiting to be confessed, believed and lived out. That was why he risked everything to get the message out to those who had not heard. We can perform powerful deeds and say, "Lord, lord," but forget to listen with all of our hearts, and obey the word God has given us with all our strength. St Augustine of Hippo once wrote, "Do not seek to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand." God help us by the gift of faith to let the Holy Spirit into our minds and hearts to teach us, lead us, to live out the faith of Jesus Christ. May our faith become the way we learn about life. Amen.