

The Power of Our Words.

I'm sure all of you remember the biblical story of creation in Genesis, and how it began with these words: ¹*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* ²*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* I thought about these words, when I was working on my sermon, because when we consider the state in which we find the disciples in today's gospel, "without form and void, and darkness" pretty well describes the state in which we find them.

Because, even though seven days have passed since we celebrated Easter Sunday, in terms of our gospel reading this morning, only a few hours have passed. And the disciples have gathered together behind locked doors, just in case the same religious authorities who arranged for the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus decide now to set their sights on the followers of Jesus. That's at the forefront of their minds; that, and the fact that, as far as they know, Jesus is still dead, dead, dead.

Some commentators have suggested that, in some ways, Jesus wasn't the only person to have died on Good Friday. His disciples went through a *type* of death. For, when Jesus died, its likely that their hopes and dreams also died, as well as their faith in all that he stood for. Yes, I think that "without form and void, and darkness" is a good description of what life is like for those disciples.

Thinking back to the Genesis creation story, however, what comes next? It's this: ³*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.* And as if life is imitating art, (or, in this case, literature) into their midst appears Jesus. And he speaks.

We all know how powerful words can be. They can create or destroy. And any parent should know how much their children will take to heart the words that come out of their mom or dad's mouth. Words can build them up, or cause them to crash to the ground. And I'm telling you the truth when I say that I can remember more vividly the harmful words that my parents spoke to me when I was a child, than any of the good things they said. And as a parent myself now, the things I most regret are the harmful words I've said to my two daughters. And even in a community such as our's here at St. Luke's, the words we say to each other can either bind us together or drive us apart. And I'm not just thinking of the words that we say *to* each other, but also the things we say *about* each other. Words, whether spoken or written, whether positive or negative, are just that powerful.

And as Jesus stood before his disciples, I'm sure he understood both the creative *and* the destructive power his words could have on them, and that these might very well be the most important words he would ever say to them. And what does Jesus say? Well, I'm fairly sure the disciples were expecting something like "Where were you when I needed you most?" or "How

could you do that to me? I thought you were my friends!” But Jesus says none of these things. Instead, he says “Peace be with you.” And using only four words, God in Christ brings forth, from that dark, formless void, a new creation.

This is good news, indeed, because it means that God in Christ can come to us no matter what state our lives are in. Because the unfailing love and unbeatable power of God penetrates all locked doors, and we are assured that God’s love is not reserved just for those who deserve it, nor for those who are willing to receive it. And without any regard for the circumstances of our lives, Jesus comes as light into the midst of whatever darkness surrounds us. In other words, we are able to appropriate the power of God – and perhaps even *best* appropriate it – when we are at our worst, when we are at our weakest, and when our world doesn’t seem to work any longer. And if our gospel readings tells us anything it’s that, when we are utterly at our wits end, that the power and love and acceptance of God takes hold of us most profoundly. For that’s when we can best hear the words of Jesus being spoken in our ears: “Peace be with you.”

In other words, being powerless does not mean that we are also helpless. Rather, it means that, like the “poor in spirit” that Jesus names in his Sermon on the Mount, we are blessed in finally being truly ready to receive what he has to give us.

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus went into a synagogue on the sabbath and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. This is what he read: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

And so, even at the end of his time on earth, Jesus is fulfilling the words of his mission, which he uttered at the beginning of his ministry, by releasing the disciples from the prison of their sins and cowardice, and guilt and shame. And his actions are to be their example, as they are to be an example for us: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

In the end, we are left with these questions to ponder: What prisons do we need to be released from? And what prisons do we need to free other from? Have we ever refused to forgive someone for something that they did to us? Or have we ever suffered from the unforgiveness of others? Unforgiveness is a powerful force, but the irony of it is that it imprisons the offender as well as the offended. If we can learn anything from today’s gospel reading it is this: With our very words we have the power to create or destroy the relationships that are important to us. Therefore, we need to be wise in the things we say and do, for the consequences of our decisions will last for a very long time. We have the ability and power to built up or to destroy, and the choice is ours. Pray to God that we may choose wisely. Amen.