

Mark 9:2-9

Feb. 14, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever paid much attention to all of the things you say in a day?

How often do you speak words of love, peace, encouragement, frustration, anger, or disgust in any given day?

That could actually be a really good Lenten exercise. Keep track of what you say, see how often you speak ill or good, and then work on conscientious speaking.

Because, words matter. What we say can really have an impact on someone else by either lifting them up or crushing them to the ground.

We all know the school yard taunt – “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” And we all know that that is a big fat lie. Word injuries can last a whole lot longer than simply getting hit.

Words matter. Words absolutely matter, and as TJ Ducklo found out, you can't take them back. Once they are out there – they are out there.

In today's texts we get a lot of words being spoken, except in one instance. Did you catch that? There is one place where someone doesn't speak.

In 2 Kings, Elijah is about to be taken up to heaven. Elisha, also being a prophet, already knows that, but that doesn't stop all of the other prophets from constantly reminding him.

Hey – your buddy Elijah is going to heaven today. Yeah – I know – shut it. But everywhere they go, everyone has to tell Elisha what he already knows.

And why do they do that? Do they want to prove that they are good prophets too? Elisha was Elijah's favorite. Were they like Joseph's brothers who were jealous of all of the attention Elisha was getting? Maybe. But, you'll notice that Elisha isn't telling them what he knows – he just tells them to be silent.

Does Elisha want silence, because he's already sad and anxious? He doesn't want to see Elijah go. Elijah is his mentor and like a father to him.

Elijah, on the other hand, is constantly telling Elisha to just stay where they had been. Just stay here. “God has sent me off to another place.” But, Elisha refuses. Like Ruth with Naomi, Elisha refuses to leave Elijah.

Three times Elisha tells Elijah that he will not leave him. Three times Elisha is offered an out from being Elijah’s successor, but he doesn’t take it.

Instead, three times he affirms his willingness to follow Elijah. In Jewish tradition, affirming something three times is really important. It means you are serious about whatever it is. Elisha is serious about keeping Elijah’s ministry going.

And then, knowing that his end is near, that he will soon be taken to heaven, Elijah asks Elisha what he wants. Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah’s spirit. He doesn’t want to be twice as powerful as Elijah, he just wants to be considered Elijah’s primary heir.

The first born in Israel was always given a double share of the other children. By asking for a double share, Elisha is saying that he is willing to take on Elijah’s role in Israel, which is quite significant. Elijah is the prophet extraordinaire.

Knowing that he cannot just give someone else the spirit, Elijah leaves it up to God, telling Elisha that if he sees him taken to heaven, he will receive what he has asked. And Elisha does see it. He then proclaims aloud as he watches Elijah head off to heaven – “It’s the heavenly hosts!” or heaven’s army. That should remind you of Jesus’ birth and the announcement to the shepherds that the Messiah has been born.

In the Psalm, the psalmist declares God’s greatness and announces that even heaven proclaims God’s greatness. He also affirms that it is God alone who spoke all of creation into existence. God spoke and the prophet speaks.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul says that we also should say something about God’s greatness. We aren’t to proclaim how fantastic we are, but that Jesus Christ is Lord. All good things come from him, not us. Jesus Christ is God’s glory – he is God’s light – he is God’s own face.

Which, ties in with the Gospel reading. That’s why Jesus is so glowy. He is God’s glory personified. Glory means shiny or light.

The magi followed a “star” because light was leading the way to light. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And, he is, borrowing from John, the Word of God. God’s own creating word, which was spoken in the beginning.

Words are spoken. They can either lift up or destroy. God's Word is about life and creation.

So, I asked you earlier who doesn't speak in today's texts. It's the Word of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who doesn't say anything in today's Gospel reading while they are on the mountain.

Elijah, the big prophet who was taken to heaven, talks. Moses, the bestower of the Law, talks. Peter, the number one disciple, talks. And, God, the creator of all, talks. But, Jesus doesn't say a word. The Word doesn't say a word. Well - not until they head off of the mountain.

What is said on the mountain though is interesting. We don't know exactly what Moses and Elijah had to say, but they are clearly visiting with Jesus, because Jesus is the fulfilling of the Law and the Prophets. He is the one who has been spoken from the very beginning – God's word.

Peter, terrified, starts rambling. Words just come spewing out of his mouth. Peter either gets a lot of flak or gets put up on a pedestal, but he is actually really relatable. While he's freaking out, he just starts spewing words. "Uh – this is big – we have to do something. I know – let's build tents. Yes – tents. That's the answer. Tents. We've got to mark this place. Yeah. Yeah. Tents. Let's make tents."

Which is understandable - that's what you do on sacred ground. You raise an ebenezer so that no one forgets what happened there. Usually it's a mound of rocks, but Peter is being a good host and wants to give Moses and Elijah a place to stay, and one for Jesus as well. But, Jesus is not going to stay on the mountain.

Jesus is on the loose! He is on the move and he is heading to Jerusalem and the cross. The time is short before he heads back to heaven and he has got a lot to do. He's got places to go. People to see. Like Elijah, he is being sent. Jesus has to get the message of God's love out to as many people as possible before the crucifixion. He's not staying up on a mountain, not even with a tent.

But, for the first time, Jesus isn't sure what to say to the disciples, because they are absolutely freaking out. I imagine the disciples with hair on fire and lots of running around in circles. And then, to help Jesus out, God speaks, because that's so much more comforting. And what does God say?– "Listen to my word – listen to Jesus!" Listen – don't speak – just listen.

As they head down the mountain, Jesus clarifies – don't say anything until I am resurrected from the dead.

Don't say anything until you fully understand what is going on. This isn't a dog and pony show of healing and casting out demons, something much bigger is going to happen. Jesus lets them in on the finale, his death and resurrection, but they absolutely cannot fathom what in the world Jesus is talking about.

Lucky for us, we already know the rest of the story, and because we know the full story, we are encouraged to speak – speak the words of God's love in the world and to the world. Speak words of life. Speak Jesus.

Because, words matter. Words absolutely matter, and God knows that. So, Jesus, the word, is made flesh and in his death and resurrection we hear God's full story being told. In Jesus, we hear all that God has to say to us.

God is not against us. God is literally with us. God is on our side and loves us completely.

Fulfilling what Moses and Elijah had testified to, Jesus destroys all of the forces of evil that separate us from God. God removes the words of hostility and anger that have been pointed at us so that we can speak God's love in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, we are able to speak Jesus.

Words matter, and in baptism, we take on Jesus' title of being the beloved and are sent to be Jesus' voice in the world.

As we head into the 40 days of Lent, we go with the assurance of God's love as we dive even deeper into that love.

We practice the 40 days of Lent, so that when something tragic really does happen, we're already prepared for those days. We already speak God's word of love as our first language.

And that's what St. Valentine did while in a Roman prison. He was locked up and heading to execution for being a Christian, but he kept speaking Jesus and God's love to anyone who would listen. The day he died he left a letter to the prison guard's daughter reminding her that God is love and that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, so she should have no fear or sadness for him. He signed his letter "your Valentine."

So, think about doing an assessment of the words you speak each day. Are you speaking Jesus on a regular basis?

St. Teresa of Avila said - "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

And we can add to that – yours is the mouth through which Jesus speaks words of compassion and love to a hurting world right here and now.

Yours is the mouth. Yours is the voice. Yours is the Word.

Just as Elijah handed the mantel to Elisha, so the mantel of speaking Jesus in the world has been passed onto us by those who came before us – all the way back to Peter, James, John, and Paul.

Jesus did not stay on Mt. Tabor.

He's on the loose – in each and every one of us today.

May what we say reflect that.

Thanks be to God. Amen.