

I love the fact that Jesus gives Peter a new name, when that fisherman becomes a Disciple. Evidently, for God names are important. The Bible says that God calls us all by name (See Is.43:1; Rev.2:17; Joel 2:32, Acts 2:31; Rom.10:13) For Jesus, the giving of a name was important (See Jn.1:42) as it had been for Abram and Jacob. (Gen.17:5; 32:28). But the power of that name is dependent on the honor of the family. And, in the family of God, we each of us either contribute to or detract from the name of "Christian," by the deeds we do and the words we speak. Thus, although we cannot be sinless, we can sin less!¹



Providence Lithograph's 1904 image of Isaiah

This morning, we heard the second of four different Servant Songs from Isaiah (see Is.42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 53:1-11). In a moment of Spiritual rapture God uses the pen of the Prophet Isaiah to describe the coming Messiah as The Lord's Servant. The ancient Jews understood this kind of Servant to be the High King's emissary, his representative with full royal powers. Of course, we know this prophesied Envoy from the King of Kings as The Lord, Jesus.

In this, the Second Servant Song from Isaiah 49, we are told about The Servant's mission. We read that this King who is coming will be given to us by God as His covenant. (See Is.49:8) Isaiah has already hinted at this mission in Chapter 42, where God declares that He will give His servant to the people as His Covenant and His light to the nations. (See Is.42:6) You see, God knew right from the start that you and I wouldn't be able to remain completely and perfectly obedient to His commandments. But for a Covenant you need 2 faithful parties. So, Jesus was sent to represent us in God's Covenant. This, then, is the New Covenant, and we remember it each Sunday when we re-commemorate the words of Jesus the night of his betrayal when he said, "This is the New Covenant of my blood." (See Mt.26:28; Mk.14:24; Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25)

And did you note the very first piece of ammunition with which the Lord is going to arm His Covenantal servant? The first tool in the tool box of this divine Envoy from the High King – the very first instrument that God's Servant is going to bring into use is His Word. Right away in verse 2 of this morning's Old Testament reading, we get this description of what the Messiah is going to be like. We read that, "God made my mouth like a sharpened sword." (See Is.49:1) How strange! How can what issues from someone's mouth, how can the very words that someone speaks carry the force, and power, and threat of a sharpened sword?

And let's be clear about what we're reading here. This was thousands of years before the invention of gun-powder and artillery, long before the age of the firearm. In the era in which Isaiah was writing, in various parts of the world, people had only just discovered that if you mixed in charcoal (containing carbon) with iron ore at your forge, as you were beating the iron into the shape of a blade, this process produced steel. And the steel sword could be given a hardened sharp edge that was able to sever life in an instant. Such a blade was, for that time, the most fearsome of weapons anyone could wield. So what Isaiah is really saying here is that the word of the Servant of God when he comes will be just as powerful and fearful as any weapon you could possibly imagine; a matter of life and death. Now how is this possible? Are words – or better – is **The Word** really so astonishingly powerful a thing to wield? Could the Word of this divine Covenant Keeper who is to come really be that mighty?

¹ See Max Lucado's *Daily Devotional Archives*, page 3.

Well, to answer the question we might want to start with the words of the guy who actually had this vision, the prophet Isaiah himself. His words were so powerful and such a threat to those in authority that, according to Jewish tradition, the evil King Manasseh had Isaiah sawn in half.² What was it that gave so much weight to Isaiah's word? What was it that gave whatever Isaiah said such terrible power, so that the mighty King Manasseh knew this man of God had to be eliminated from the picture at all costs? Don't you wish your words had that much "umph"! What do I need to do so that the Spirit of God dwells so richly in me that what comes out of my mouth will make even princes tremble?

It seems to me that words with that kind of power always have three things in common. And these things are delivery, content, and motive. Let's consider these three attributes as we are thinking of about the power of the Word.

Delivery: There's a reason why God speaks in a whisper (see 1Ki.19:12). If He were screaming at us all the time we wouldn't listen. There's a reason why God speaks to us most sparingly, and usually in our time of great need. If He were constantly chattering at us, even during those times when we didn't feel like we needed him, we wouldn't listen. No, God waits to talk to us – sometimes for years. If you don't believe it, read about the life of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. God speaks to us softly and sparingly. So tell me, how do you speak to the people *you* love? Do you talk quietly to your loved ones, and do you listen to them carefully so that you can provide those gentle, wise responses they need to hear, particularly in their moments of pain and challenge? Or are your words a constant hemorrhage of judgment and instruction? Do you insist on talking, even when they are trying to empty out their own hearts to you? If so, is it any surprise that they are not listening?

Content: If our words obtain great meaning through our method of delivery, the value of our words also depends on their content. I have such a Peter Principal operating in my life. By "Peter Principle," I mean that I am so very much like the Disciple Peter, always speaking before I've thought it through. In what I say, I am so often – just like Peter – jumping out of the boat in a fit of enthusiasm, jumping into the waves in order to rush toward My Lord, forgetting for a moment that I cannot walk on water. I don't think things through nearly enough. I don't research my plans carefully enough, and frequently with what I say I invariably end up plunging myself into water for too deep and stormy for me to swim. And the accuracy and content of what I say ends up glaringly mistaken. If I could only learn to exercise my mind before I exercise my vocal chords! If I could only learn to do that, I'm sure the content of my words would have greater power.

So, we've talked about the delivery and content. And while the delivery of my words and the content of my words are two things that give my words much value, the most powerful element that creates force in my words is their origin. And this goes straight to motive.

Motive: The process of expression through the human word is a complex one, and I don't pretend to be an expert on it. But we are all given some ability to sniff out the motives that people have when they are speaking to us. Some of us are more gifted in this ability than others, but we can usually tell when someone is lying to us, if we give ourselves time to think. We can normally sense when someone is trying to manipulate us. Human beings are given an ability to sense and understand the motives driving the words and actions of those around us. And the most forceful origin of the word, the most powerful motive for human expression in the universe is love. And God is love. We are told this time and time again in Scripture. (See 1Jn.4:8, 10, 16; Jn.3:16; 13:34-35; 1Cor.13:4; Eph.2:4 16; Gal.2:20; 5:22; Rom.8:39).

² For information on this tradition, you may wish to read the Introductory notes to Isaiah in the Zondervan *NIV Study Bible*.

So, in the end, it is the Creator God, the Lord of Love that animates the Word with its greatest power. And so, if you are speaking humbly, and thoughtfully about this great love, if you are earnestly trying to tell people about this greatest of motives, here's the amazing thing: They will listen.

Oh, it might take some patience, but eventually if people understand the sincere, humble, gentle motive of great love that is guiding your words, people will eventually stop and listen. And so we come to the Gospel account of this morning. I love this passage because the power of the word is operating so very clearly here. John the Baptist is standing talking with two of his disciples. And when John says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God," these two men, we are told, followed Jesus. By this we understand that, from that very moment, they – who we believe to be Andrew and John – left their work, and their homes, gave up everything and became Disciples and Apostles of the Lord, just because John the Baptist had said, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." (See Jn.1:29, 36)

Can you imagine living your life in such a way? Can you imagine being so washed through with the Spirit of God that when you speak, people leave behind everything they have known up until that point and begin a new life, a life in the Lord. Can you imagine your word having that kind of power?

And then there is Andrew, quiet, gentle Andrew who comes to his older brother Peter and says to him, "We have found the Christ." (See Jn.1:41). And Peter leaves his nets, and his job, and his hometown and becomes *the* Apostle upon which Jesus builds His church against which the gates of Hell will never prevail. (See Mt.16:18) And all this happens, simply because Peter's younger brother Andrew comes to him and says, "Come on, Peter, we've found him. It's time to go." And Peter gets up from his former life and follows his baby brother, and the entire history of mankind is changed forever. Can you imagine how strong the spirit of truth, and humility, and love must have been in Andrew? How awesomely the Spirit of God must have been dwelling in the life and in the word of Peter's younger brother to command *that* kind of respect. All he had to say was, "I have found the Lord." That was enough.



Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew* (c.1606)

So let me ask you this morning: Does the Spirit of the living God dwell so strongly in you that you too can say, "I have found the Lord"? Are you living your life in such a way that those around you will believe, and follow you to the Cross? And in following The Word, Our Lord Jesus, are you also marinating your soul daily in the Word of Holy Scripture?

Good people, in our own Articles of Religion, we profess and I am absolutely convinced that the Word of God as contained in Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for our salvation³ Because the Word of God is a mighty thing, yes sharper than any two-edged sword, so powerful that it can move mountains, and yet so gentle that it speaks clearly with the quiet of a sunrise. And those who dwell in The Word, they are the ones who are truly changed from glory into glory.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB†, 01-13-17

³ See BCP 1979, p. 868, Article VI