

Sermon for Sunday, April 30, 2017 - "Beyond Words"

Third Sunday of Easter
Confirmation Sunday
April 30, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beyond Words

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

There are times when words don't work - when they just don't help us to make sense of things.

Words don't always work for you students even when you have great teachers, even when you're trying hard to understand, even in confirmation class here (maybe especially in confirmation class here!).

Words fail us when a baby is born, love unfolds or healing happens; and the experience is just beyond description.

Words fail when there's a difficult medical diagnosis, or that terrible phone call comes, or the fog of depression descends.

And sometimes there are just too many words - tweets and texts and emails and posts and breaking news updates. We get an information overload and can't keep up with all the words that come at us all the time.

Words don't work for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They've had a very long weekend and they're in the middle of a very long day - the day of Jesus' resurrection. Nothing is making sense.

The day began with the women of their group running from the tomb claiming they'd seen angels who said Jesus was alive.

But, as we learn earlier in Luke, the disciples think the women's report is an idle tale - empty words. Others go to the tomb and find it empty but don't see Jesus or angels, so there are conflicting reports; the disciples don't know what to believe. As two of the disciples walk along the road to Emmaus they talk about all the things that have happened and try to make sense of it all.

As they're talking and discussing, Jesus himself comes near and goes with them; but their eyes are kept from recognizing him. He asks them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

The question stops them in their tracks. They can't believe someone hasn't heard about all the things that have consumed their life and become their world, the things about Jesus that had once given them reason to hope, and now cause to despair. They tell the stranger everything about Jesus: his teaching, his death, the women's strange claims of resurrection. The stranger then starts interpreting the scripture to them, going all the way back to Moses; but still they don't understand, still they can't recognize that it is Jesus.

It isn't until they insist that this stranger stay with them as evening falls that things begin to change. Nothing makes sense, but they know the importance of kindness and hospitality. Nothing makes sense, but they know this stranger needs a meal and lodging. So, they insist that he stay and he does.

After a long, confusing day full of lots of words ...
 kindness is extended,
 a stranger is welcomed,
 a meal is shared.

These simple practices of hospitality and community provide an opening in all the confusion, a pause in the endless talking, that allows the disciples to become aware of a truth that is beyond words. Jesus is alive and is present with them.

As soon as they recognize him, Jesus vanishes. But these disciples have been given all that they need.

They realize that he was with them all along, that he has opened the scriptures to them and set their hearts on fire.

In that simple meal, the disciples experience the truth of Jesus found in all of scripture - the truth that God is at work even when everything look hopeless, that God brings life out of death, that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

So often we are like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We fail to recognize that Jesus is now always present with us and always working new life for us. We get stuck in our heads, consumed by our confusion, so focused on words (says the preacher fully aware of the irony here).

We think we have to get our thinking straight, get everything all figured out, come to correct understandings; and then totally miss God's presence with us everywhere. Like the disciples, we need practices that provide a pause in all the words, that get us out of our heads, and provide an opening for us to encounter Jesus.

We need Sabbath rest in which we can turn off the incessant noise and tune into people, nature, and the life-giving Word of God.

We need to practice hospitality in daily life and in service to others. As we do, we will encounter Christ in strangers and those the world considers to be last and least.

And we need to gather around the table each week where Christ breaks bread, blesses us and shows us that he is present and working life through simple, broken things.

These are the practices that we commit to as Christians when we affirm our faith as Ava and Keaton will do today. We commit:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people following the example of Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Even when nothing makes sense, especially when nothing makes sense, we need these life-giving practices of faith.

These practices help us to recognize and encounter Jesus. They help us to taste and experience the truth of Jesus found in all of scripture - the truth that God is at work even when everything looks hopeless, that God brings life out of death, that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

As Keaton and Ava confirm their faith, let's all recommit to these practices and then let's come to the table to taste and see Jesus.

But first, let's take a moment to pause in silent reflection.