

Sermon Epiphany 4B 2018: The Word of God For Our Lives – Jesus Speaks To Us

Introduction: A World of Words

We live in a world of words;

Words are all about us: words on television, words on the radio; words in texts;

Words spoken by family and friends, by priests and teachers, by politicians;

Words printed in the newspaper, in books, on computer, over the internet;

Words in instagrams, snapchats and tweets.

You might be interested to know that the average person talks

At a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute;

And that the average person can listen at a rate of 450 words per minute;

And that most of us use 2,000 distinct words every day;

As individuals, we speak between seven and ten thousand words each day.

We're made to talk and to listen, but this world of words has turned many of us

Into a people who are often overwhelmed,

Suffocated, even buried in a mounting pile of words.

And with so many words around us and so many words every day;

Words have a tendency to lose their meaning; they become unimportant;

They no longer have the value and influence they are meant to have;

And we too often stop paying attention to what is being said.

A New York Times columnist, intrigued by our inability to listen in this world of words

And he began a one person experiment to prove that no one really listens

To what people are saying and tried it out at parties he attended.

Whenever he was invited, he would consider what his stories would be for that night;

He'd always arrive late;

So that most of the guests were already engaged in conversation.

When he finally did arrive, the host or hostess would greet him.

And his favorite made-up explanation for why he was late was,

“Sorry I’m late, I had to burn down my house and it took a lot longer than I thought.”

Without blinking an eye, one hostess said she understood perfectly,

“I was almost late myself,” she said, “Everyone is so busy.

Enjoy yourself. Have a good time.”

As he mingled around one party, someone asked him what he did for a living.

“Oh, I’m the head executioner for the State.”

The person continued, “Well, that must be interesting work.

How does business look this year?”

We’re caught up in a sea of words, in a world of words;

Some with special meaning and authority, others with no meaning at all;

And unless we’re going to enter into a monastery or hermitage

Where there’s total silence,

We’re going to have to figure out how to sift through the too many words,

So that we don’t miss the important words that give life;

The words that bring freedom, that offer hope, that bring peace;

Words that bring power and healing and direction for our lives.

For even in this groundswell of words that accost our ears and eyes every day,

Some words maintain their importance and can still have power in our lives.

And one place where we can hear that important word, that word of life

Is here in Church on Sundays or when we open our Bibles at home

Because we believe that these words are inspired by God;

And when God speaks, His words have an authority and a power

And a hope for the future that are worth listening to.

The Gospel And the Authority of Jesus' Words

The fact that Mark writes in his Gospel that the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching
That they were amazed by His words, suggests that times haven't changed too much;
That even in their less technologically advanced world,
They may have had too many words themselves;
And Jesus' words are different enough that they take notice.

Apparently there is something very special about Jesus' words;
They are different from the words of their everyday lives;
Different from the words of the scribes, who usually teach in the synagogue,
By reinforcing what others had already said or taught about God.

But Jesus comes and speaks with an authority that is distinctive;
He doesn't quote past learned men or commentaries on scripture;
He is the sole authority for His words, the authority of God Himself;
"I am the bread of life," Jesus says;
"I am the resurrection and the life"; Jesus promises;
"Take heart, your sins are forgiven you."
"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will refresh you."
"I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance."

God's Word, the Word that God used to create the heavens and the earth,
The Word that brought all things into existence is incarnate, is alive in Jesus;
And so Jesus speaks with an authority, with a wisdom
That was present from the beginning of time;
And had power then and has power today.

And that authoritative word of Jesus is a word of liberation;
A word of comfort, a word of release, a word of pardon, a word of life.

Jesus announces through His words the very presence of God's kingdom
That is now at work in this world;

And the people recognize that there is an authority here
That makes Jesus words worth listening to.

The Gospel and Jesus' Power

And if Jesus, the teacher and His words, are not authoritative enough for some,
Next Jesus reveals the power that is in His words;

As He speaks to drive out an unclean spirit from a man attending services;
In the synagogue that Sabbath day.

Now, I don't want to become too distracted by whether it is demon possession
As St. Mark and the people of Jesus' day clearly believed;

Or whether it's some kind of scientifically explainable malady
That has a hold of this man.

Whichever it is, Jesus uses His words to drive it out
And heals the man to return him to his right mind;

And to the fullness of life God wants for all his children.

There is a power in Jesus' words;

A power to bring healing, strength and forgiveness into the life of that man;

And to restore the man into a living relationship with God and other people
Because Jesus' words have a power to affect people's lives.

I can't count the number of times that I've seen for myself

How the words of Jesus have changed a family from grief to hope

As they struggle with the death of someone they love

Families who are changed by Jesus' promise

That He has prepared a mansion for their loved one

And that their loved one is alive and that one day they will see her again.

Or when someone comes to talk with me, looking for direction in their lives,
Or weighed down by whatever life they are living;
“Come, follow me, into a life that is really life”;
Or “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
For I am gentle in spirit and my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

There is a power in Jesus’ words and in His words come life for you and for me;
Real life that is ours when we listen to what He is saying to us and respond.

The Gospel and Hope

Because Jesus has authority, because Jesus has power,
Because His words do affect our lives,
Then we are a people who can live and do live with hope;
A people who live with a hope that things can change, that things can be different;
That through the words of Jesus, God’s kingdom will draw near to us.

We can live life as victors instead of as victims
Because of the hope we have in Jesus Christ to redeem our lives,
And to bring forth the authority and the power of His words living in us
And in the world around us.

But we have to pay attention to His words;
We have to listen for them in Church;
We have to spend time pouring over Jesus’ words in the Gospels;
We have to listen for His living voice in the words of others;
We need to take time to listen to His words for us;
In the quiet of our prayer;
As we wait on God to touch our lives
And speak the words of life.

There are lot of words in our worlds;
But in this world of words, there is one, clear, loud, authoritative word,

Which stands out against all others;
And that is Jesus' word of grace.

And so today and throughout this week,

I invite you to take some time to listen to the words of Jesus;
Open your Bible tonight or tomorrow morning
And allow His authority and power and message of hope
Grasp you and take hold of you
With the same power and authority and hope
That astonished that little synagogue in Capernaum nearly two thousand years ago.

Be still in God's presence when you wake up each morning;

Listen for God's words at some break in your day;

Pay attention to God's presence and assurances

When you lay in bed before going to sleep;

Be quiet and listen because He speaks to us still

And God's words are life.

And when you know the power of the word in your life;

Allow the Spirit to help you share it with others.

Amen.