

January 17, 2016

John 2:1-11

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

- “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” (Neil Armstrong)
- “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” (John F. Kennedy)
- “The buck stops here.” (Harry S. Truman)
- “Time is money.” (Benjamin Franklin)
- “Four score and seven years ago...” (Gettysburg Address – Abraham Lincoln)
- “I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.” Martin Luther
- “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” (Martin Luther King Jr.)

I am guessing most of us have heard all of the above statements. Perhaps, the one from Luther is new to some of you but since this is a Lutheran church I just had to include what Luther said in 1521 at the Diet of Worms (south of Frankfurt, Germany) before the holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who mandated he rescind his writings and teachings or be deemed a heretic, subject to death. Also, one day before the remembrance of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday (although officially he was born on January 15) it seemed almost counter to the entire gospel of Christ not to include the words above from this voice of truth and justice. One would like to think nearly 50 years later in America there would be some truth to these prophetic words. While certainly there is some truth to these words, we also know racism continues to

exist. People continue to be judged on skin color. Reverend King's voice continues to call out for truth and justice and as the church we are called to join in and advocate for justice and equality on behalf of all people – all classes, all races, all nationalities.

Those words continue to live on and the quotes above continue to be etched in our minds. Whether we believe them or not they were well intentioned by their authors and had great meaning and value to each of them. Words are so important and just a few short words can mean so much can't they. Words such as, "I love you" or "I am proud of you" or "Thank you" have a way of lifting us up, building us up, giving us strength, and letting us know we are valued. They are words we all long to hear. And there are words such as, "I am sorry" or "I forgive you" that can transform hurts and divisions and begin to create a bridge to healing, wholeness, and new life. Just a few shorts words can carry so much weight.

Our passage this morning from the gospel of John opens with four well intended words on behalf of the author, "On the third day..." Forget everything from this point on and immediately those hearing John's gospel, which was composed some 60-80 years after Christ's death, and the church throughout all of history would pick up on these key words and immediately their minds would be transported to Easter Day – the third day when Jesus arose from the death. Put all else aside and those first few words tell us so much about what is about to come. These four words, "on the third day" are where we find our hope. They are essential to our faith. They are at the core of all we

cling to and what we have come to believe through the power of the Holy Spirit. On the third day sparks light into the darkness of our world. On the third day breathes life into where once there was only death. On the third day makes the promise of new beginnings where it seemed there were none. On the third day blossoms forth hope where previously there was only despair. On the third day transforms everything we once held to be true into the reality of that which the world deemed impossible. On the third day radiated the abundance of God's love for all. On the third day ... perhaps the church needs to say it more often. On the third day ... perhaps we need to proclaim it beyond the doors of this building more often – to a friend who has nowhere to turn and has given up on life, to a coworker battling an addiction, to a young man bullied due to his sexual orientation, to a friend whose child just died unexpectedly, to a loved one just diagnosed with an incurable disease, to a congregation mourning a year in which several members died and several others moved away. On the third day ... he will rise again. On the third day ... he did rise again. On the third day ... everything changed. On the third day ... there is hope for whatever it is we are experiencing.

Where in our lives do we need so desperately to hear these four words, “on the third day?” Where do we need the transformational power of what God has done in Christ to bring death out of new life? Where do we need the hope of these words? Where do we need the abundance of God's love that shine through these words? These few words are more powerful than we can ever imagine. Yet, we do our best to steer clear

of them and seek comfort in other words, other things, and we often do our best to utter words that run so counter to these words. We do our best to utter words that are false, that are gossip, and do the exact opposite of the end result of these four words. Why is it so difficult? A good question we all long for an answer to. The Bible reveals to us many things and one of those things is the fact of how difficult or rather how impossible it is to not fall victim to the evils of sin. How hard it is to trust in words of God such as, “on the third day”; yet, how easy it is to be swayed and led by different words. This is exactly why we need to repeatedly hear the possibility of the impossible. This is exactly why we need the Holy Spirit’s guidance in speaking to us, revealing to us, and equipping us with the ability to believe the sign of God’s abundant, extravagant, forgiving, transforming, radiating, and everlasting grace as it was and continues to be revealed through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who:

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
(Second article of *The Apostles’ Creed*)

On the third day ... our promise, our hope, our God doing the impossible and showing us so much about God’s love for the world and all God created!