

John 6:56-69

August 26, 2018

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

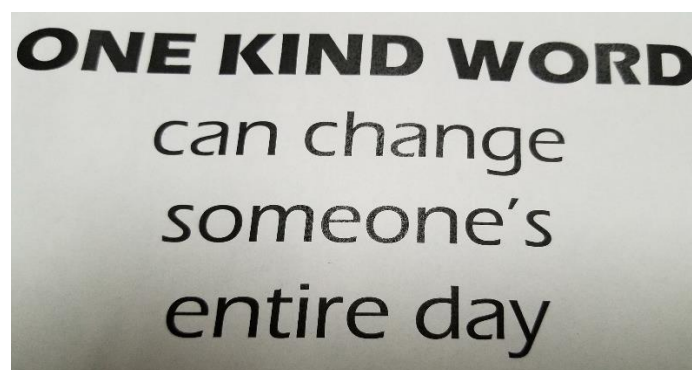
Over the span of my time here at Bethany and during internship and chaplaincy while at seminary I have had the privilege to sit with so many faithful followers of Jesus Christ during some of the most difficult times of their lives. These are beloved sons and daughters of God who in their time of need and possibly as death looms ever close cling to a variety of different things to see them through. So often that is the love of family and friends that surround and support them. Or perhaps it is fond memories of days gone by who still bring them joy, a smile, or even laughter amid their pain. And it also words. Simple words such as "I love you" or "Thank you for being a great friend" or "I am so grateful you were in my life." But, also words of life spoken through the book of life, the living word of God that is the Bible. The faithful cling to passages that comfort, bring hope, calm fears, and breathe life where some may only see death. They are words such as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and the image of God as the good shepherd who leads us beside still waters and into green pastures and even when we find ourselves in dark valleys God is there to calm our fears and comfort our woes. They are words such as John 3:16 that speak of God's great love for us and

the promise of eternal life to all who believe in Jesus Christ. They are words such as those from the 41<sup>st</sup> chapter of Isaiah that recall the promise we are servants chosen by God and God's presence is always with us and his victorious right hand will uphold us. Words from Revelations that speak of a new Jerusalem where the faithful departed will see God face to face and there will be no more weeping or pain. They are words from the prophet Joshua reminding us to be strong and courageous, not frightened or dismayed because the Lord is with us. We could go on and on here with the beautiful words of scripture that feed our aching souls, lead us into the abundance of God's grace and love, calm our fears, and help us continue abide in Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.

During my week at Camp EWALU we took a visit to a congregation just minutes north of the camp the oldest Lutheran congregation west of the Mississippi, St. Sebald Lutheran Church founded in 1852 by a German missionary. Pastor Mark Pries, who recent retired from Zion Lutheran Church in Iowa City, and has a long history with Camp EWALU was on hand to share with us his knowledge of this congregation and its history. Just beyond the walls of the church building is a cemetery in which rest the bodies of the chorus of witnesses who gave gone before. Their headstones engraved with their names, beautiful images, and yes – words. He shared the story of one head stone that moved him because on it was a

portion of verse 10 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of John. Can anyone recall that one from memory? Don't feel bad, none of us could as well. This verse comes from the first miracle Jesus performs in John's gospel, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Specifically, the words quoted stated, "You have saved the best for last." If we recall the passage spoke of how most weddings the good wine was rolled out first and then replaced with the lower quality wine. However, that is not so in God's kingdom. No, the best is saved for last and for this saint who had died generations ago these words surely breathed life and hope into their impending death. What was to come was surely better than life in the flesh.

Words do indeed have power. One can do a simple search online and find quote after quote about the power of our words. In fact, I have this quote on the wall in my office, "One kind word can change someone's entire day."



Here are a few others:

- "Words have the power to make things happen." (Frederick Buechner)
- "Words have a magical power. They can either bring the greatest happiness or the deepest despair." Sigmund Freud

- "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." -Mother Teresa

For weeks now, we have been in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John and Jesus seems to have exhausted us with ever image conceivable and explanatory words possible to unpack what it means when he states that he is the bread of life. Truth be told, I was somewhat begrudging another sermon on this topic. What more could be said? How many more words can I write that haven't been written before? And, then it struck me. Words that gave life to my ponderings and uncertainty. Gospel words of good news that perhaps had gone unnoticed before; but, in that moment in time breathed life into an otherwise uninspired time of sermon preparation. Those words, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life." We sing these words every Sunday just prior to reading our assigned gospel lesson; but, somehow this week those words rang louder than ever and literally popped off the screen of my computer.

They were freeing and good news because our passage opens telling us many of those gathered found Jesus' words challenging to understand. Indeed, we too have probably wrestled with them over these last few weeks. Yet, during some of Jesus' most difficult sayings Peter responds with this

confession of faith. We all know Peter and the other disciples struggle with understanding who Jesus is and in fact, will deny knowing him and desert him in his final hour. Despite all this, they know there is something about Jesus that is different than anyone else they have ever met. They know the power of the words he speaks. And it is this that makes Peter confess, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.” Not only words, but Jesus is also that very word as we recall the opening verses of John that state:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He existed in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.<sup>4</sup> The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

Peter’s confession are words for the church to follow and for each of us, individually, can help guide our lives of faith and relationship with our Lord. When discerning where God is leading us, when making difficult decisions about the future of our congregation, when experiencing a hardship in life, when wrestling with the temptations of Satan, when overcome by grief or guilt, when feeling estranged from God and unable to see, hear or feel his presence we are called to go to Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Bread of Life, and hear once again the words of eternal life.” Amen.