

Proper 19
Year B
RCL

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 116:1-8

James 3:1-12

Mark 8:27-38

Emily Dickinson said that, "sometimes, saying nothing says the most." In many cases, she's right. There is beauty and thoughtfulness through silence in a very noisy world. But in our case today, our readings invite us to glimpse into the not so simple act of saying. So, from what we just heard, who's saying what and what are we hearing? We have three distinct times and places that the lectionary speaks to. Each of those times and places speak to us right now. Let's start with Jesus. The words of Jesus are important. He is the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. He is the word proclaimed that walked in the midst of us. He is the true embodiment of the good news. On him we place our hope and salvation. If you were asked, you might respond that his treasured words are some of your favorite verses of scripture. Jesus spoke and people were drawn in, not wanting to miss one thing that he said.

But the Christian faith is an active faith and not passive. When we follow Jesus, we don't spend our time just listening to him. While they were on their way, asks his disciples, not only who people say he is, but more importantly, who THEY, the disciples, say he is. What is the world saying that I am. What are you saying that I am? The answer that you or I give may be the key to our discipleship. Jesus welcomes us into a thoughtful faith in which we regularly engage. We can become lazy and forget our responsibilities as Christians when all we do is listen and

hear Jesus speaking and not respond. Who do the disciples, who do we, say that Jesus is?

Peter answers- you are the Messiah. This is just one of the answers you or I might give. And so I want to invite you into a very brief thought exercise with me. Grab your leaflet and a pen (there are pencils in the end of the pew) and draw three columns. At the top of the middle column, write Jesus. On either side of that column write Friends/Family and Enemies/Those with which we disagree. Think of 3-5 words that you say about him and write those down. I'll give you a second. Now, think of 3-5 words that you say about those you love. Another second. Finally, think of words that you say about those you dislike or even loathe.

How much overlap in words is between the God column and the other two? When Jesus asks us who we think he is, it leads directly to the next question, then who am I? It flows from itself- what Jesus says, what we learn in following him, and what we say after we are in a relationship with him. As disciples, our words and sayings are changed, transformed, because of that relationship. How does that work then? Slide on over to the James and Isaiah readings. Both bring up the concept of teachers and teaching. While we aren't all professional teachers (we do have some among us, thank you!) teachers must first be trained. Opening up that reading a bit further, a better translation of the first line of Isaiah, which will help us connect these readings more deeply, is that God has given me the tongue of one who is taught, a well-instructed tongue, an educated tongue.

We are people who have tongues as ones who have been taught. As the world becomes more secularized, we are all teachers of the Christian faith. There are so many different versions of who Jesus is. There are so many people out there that

claim Jesus as someone differently than us. And we don't want to be related to that definition of Christian. We've all probably said at one point or another we're not those type of Christians. Yet teaching isn't about imparting all the wisdom we have or telling people how it is or how it isn't. Just like Jesus, he encourages us to teach by inviting others in, by dialogue, by engaging and connect and hearing one another.

And so we find ourselves looking at those three columns and wondering about the overlap of those words. James urges us to use our tongues, our words, wisely, not carelessly. They are free to do great good or fantastic harm. Which would Jesus have us chose? When we use our words for harm, we are reminded that on the receiving end of each of those words is a beloved creature of God. A possibly not so fun exercise could be to go back on our social media posts and see how we speak about those with whom we disagree.

Jesus wants us to think about how we articulate our relationship with him and what that means to our relationships here and now- those we love and those maybe not so much. There is grace when we make mistakes, when we don't speak as lovingly as we could. That is the good news. We are given words to sustain the weary world- which sometimes includes ourselves. Morning by morning Jesus awakens us to listen and to stand up together.