

Pentecost - Words Matter

May 19, 2024

I got a text message this week, and I want to share it with you.

Good morning, Emily!

It's my first birthday!

Today,

one year ago, I had my treatment.

I am well today and continuing to fight hard.

Thank you for every prayer, visit, and encouraging word we shared

Brighter days are here!

This message came from a patient who received a very new and complicated experimental cancer treatment. It involved extensive work at the University here, as well as a specialized clinic in California. As they continue to develop this treatment, it will revolutionize how certain cancers are treated - not with chemotherapy, but by genetically modifying a person's own blood cells to attack cancer within their bloodstream for the rest of their lives.

Modified blood was flown here to Saskatoon from California. When the treatment was administered, care teams lined the halls of the hospital all wearing red- to see how it went. The patient was in the news, and is now speaking and sharing her story with doctors and care teams. The treatment is called CAR-T.

So, a year into the healing journey, her first birthday, as she calls it. It makes sense to reflect upon the past year, and everything that has happened. But it's amazing to me, that she would remember the few prayers I had said. It's amazing to me that she would recognize those prayers as a part of the healing journey. Especially when all the scientists were doing work that was much harder, much more involved, much more important. I mean, really, what's a prayer?

You'd say, I hope all goes well, May God protect you and bring you healing, May God guide the hands of the care teams, May you receive peace... What's a prayer? *Just some words.*

Our first reading today is from the prophet Ezekiel. The name Ezekiel means something like "God is strong" or "God strengthens". He died about five hundred and seventy years before Jesus was born. Today's passage from the prophet Ezekiel, is from the time when the Babylonians, and King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. Solomon's temple that had stood in Jerusalem for over 400 years was torn to the ground. Thousands of men, women, and children, were killed, scattered, or taken back to Babylon as prisoners. Ezekiel was taken as a prisoner back to Babylon- and that's where he did his writing - what we call the book of Ezekiel.

In the story today, we hear about how the Spirit showed Ezekiel this valley of dry bones, something very dead. And then the Spirit of God tells Ezekiel to *prophesy* to the bones, to say, "*O dry bones, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live.*" And in his vision, that's what Ezekiel does, he tells the bones to get up, and to live and they do.

And the Spirit of God says, *Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'* Therefore *prophesy, and say to them,*

Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

In this Vision, Ezekiel prophesies, and bones come back to life. But what is a prophesy? You know what it is? *It's just some words.* The prophecy of Ezekiel this morning is a word to the people who thought they were destroyed and dead, that there was hope. It's the words, you can still return home someday. You will have babies again. You will worship in Jerusalem again. And about three decades later they did return home and grow as a nation again.

We could say that it was because the Persians attacked Babylon that the children of Israel were able to get away. But in the story of our ancestors, the prophecy, the words of hope that Ezekiel spoke, also meant something- because a great deal of trouble was taken to preserve them. *Just some words.*

In today's story from Acts, the disciples are gathered to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost, a time to give thanks for the first fruits of the harvest. You're thinking harvest?! We're just planting! Different climate. And they were gathered to celebrate this special feast. But they probably did not feel too happy. Jesus had recently died, he did appear to some of them, but by this time, Jesus has ascended- gone up to be with God. And the disciples were still in danger, and they weren't sure exactly how to move forward. And in that place of sadness, and confusion, an incredible wind came up and something like tongues of fire came down to the disciples and they began *speaking in tongues.* And it was quite amazing, and energizing, and in the Church, we celebrate this event as one of our major feast days! *The Day of Pentecost!*

It's considered the birthday of the church as we know it because it marks the moment when the Holy Spirit filled the followers of Jesus and they realized what to do, and ministry began.

But you'll notice here what the Holy Spirit does to these people. It makes them speak in tongues. "Speaking in tongues" in this story- Is not speaking some in magic way. In this story, tongues just means languages. The disciples start speaking in languages. *In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.*

You'd think that when the Holy Spirit came down like fire – everyone might start flying around or something like that, but no. *It's just some words.*

The really big deal about Pentecost, is that the disciples began speaking about God in words that people around them could understand. Words.

Prayers are just some words that we say for one another when things are really difficult, but for the patient celebrating her first birthday this week, those words mattered.

Prophecies are just some words that are shared by people with enough imagination to dream of a better world. But for those in exile, war, grief, loss, those words matter.

Pentecost is the day that the followers of Jesus found some words to describe what their community was about- what God had done for them. But for everyone in the square that Pentecost day, those words mattered.

Today, as people of God we are reminded how much our words matter, because they're not just words. But the way the breath of the Spirit enters into the world n the Day of Pentecost, we celebrate

that the breath of God, and the breath in our lungs is meant to inspire words to fulfill the ancient prophecy from God:

that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

On this day of Pentecost, may each of us join with those first disciples, and speak words about God in a way that people around us can understand. May our words to one another be filled with the Spirit of God. May our words bring hope, bring comfort, bring peace. May we speak words of healing, words of kindness, words of love, words of truth, words of inspiration.

It's not much, just some words, but it's something we can all do.

Amen.

Rev. Emily Carr