

## Word of Life

Maitland, Aug. 27 John 6:58-69

Faith does matter. Last week we taught that eating is a metaphor for faith. I believe we got it. This week, we discover that many of the followers of Jesus did not get it. They found it hard to accept what He had to say. Many drew back and no longer went about with Him. Jesus put it straight to the 12. Do you also wish to go away? Peter answered, "Lord to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life".

Today we'll learn that these truths can be discerned only by faith, which is God's gift, not man's achievement. (cf. Eph. 2:8)

Clearly, the church of Jesus Christ must be concerned with His word, and with the Spirit that believing His word gives. To paraphrase the author of Hebrews, "the Word of God is living and active, it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (cf. Heb.4:12)

As Presbyterians and as protestants, we are very much interested in the Word. We perk up when we hear Peter say, "You have the words of eternal life". We give Word the most prominent place in our worship. This is clearly apparent in the parament that hangs here from our pulpit. It displays the the cross used in the seal of the Presbyterian Church USA. The design was developed at the Rhode Island School of Design. It was a low budget item done by a devoted artist and has been received with great appreciation by the Prebyterian Church. The three horizontal lines of the cross denote clearly pulpit, baptismal font, and table. We are people of Word and Sacrament. We observe the sacraments from time to time. We observe the Word every time we worship.

I'm delighted to hear the emphasis on "Logos". It's a great program for studying the Word. My thoughts go back as far as 1962 when the forerunner of Logos, Youth Club, first became a strong force in Western PA, and then throughout the nation. In our case, we had as many as 75 youth walking over from the local school and staying with us from 4:00 to 7:00 for study, evening meal, crafts, and music. It involved large numbers of adults. It was happily received by the youth. It was a wonderful chance to give our youth the Word. My

prayer is that now, two generations later, it will continue to be a powerful instrument for good.

Logos is a word that we use at Christmas. In the first chapter of John, we have the words "In the beginning was Logos". The teaching is that Christ is the Word, and He was there in the beginning.

From Genesis, we get Word as divine fiat. That is, God spoke a word and things happened. "And God said, 'Let there be light . . . let there be firmament . . . let the dry land appear . . . let the earth put forth . . . let there be lights in the firmament . . . let the waters bring forth . . . let the earth bring forth living creatures . . . let us make man in our image ". This took 6 days (how long a day actually was, we do not know.) and on the 7th day God rested. I hear creation happening with word. God spoke and it happened. Please indulge my imagination. I have an image of John Madden reporting this action of God. I see John lumbering along in the desert, driving his bus/motor home and pulling up beside a Bedouin camp. They invite him in and let him share in the telling of the story. He is requested to tell the story of creation, and John Madden puts it, "And God said, 'let there be light', and BOOM, there was light". This gives new meaning to the "Big Bang" theory.

God did create the world. He spoke a word and it happened.

We have always been fascinated by and moved by words. It's still possible to hold the attention of thousands of people with words. Add modern technology to it, and the Word can reach millions upon millions. Therefore, the Word of Life can be heard everywhere.

The Word of Life comes to us through preaching. As a young man, I was exposed to exegetical preaching. Our interim pastor was a master at that art; examining the text, bringing out its minutia and applying it sermonically. The new pastor followed through with the process. On Sunday nights, the pastor labored through, and some of us suffered through, 40 minute sermons based on perhaps as little as 10 words of Scripture. If there is any preacher using this method these days, I don't know of that person. In any case, there is great power that comes to us through the preached word. This has been

abundantly true for 2,000 years. Whatever the method or style, our duty is to insist on Biblical preaching.

The interim pastor alluded to earlier was professor of New Testament at Gordon College. I did my undergraduate work there. His course, "Introduction to the New Testament", required a thorough knowledge of every book in the New Testament, and then a crusher - - the memorization of over 300 verses of Scripture. That was when I discovered the effectiveness of singing in the choir. It was amazing how much Scripture we were getting in the anthems. In many cases, I could go over the music in my head and get the words to those verses, filling the best part of a "Blue Book". (Do you remember those?) Memorization of anything does not have popularity these days. It's no surprise that young people are not committing to memory as much as we did 50 years ago. Secular or religious. Personally, I can see a great advantage to it. Perhaps the Psalmist put it best: "Thy word have I hid in my heart".

Back to singing. No congregation has to worry about my singing solos. On the other hand, a huge number of great hymns and a surprising number of Bible songs come to my mind regularly. When I'm on my bicycle for an 8 mile run, I hear these tunes and words ringing in my ears. In recent years, I've spent a lot of time on the Cross Seminole Trail, which starts near the enormous edifice of the First Baptist Church of Oviedo, and gently rolls into Winter Springs. You may know that this trail passes through some of the loveliest real estate in central FL. Often going through my mind is the Bible song from the 18th century, inspired by John Bunyon's Pilgrim's Progress, "Beulah Land". "I've reached the land of corn and wine And all its riches freely mine." Later "Where mansions are prepared for me". I find joy and comfort in the experience.

There is also the matter of speaking the Word. As we mature, there certainly will come occasions when we are moved to say to another, "May I have a word with you?" We need to be mature enough to have tact and grace and love. But we do need to give that word. We can make a difference. Visiting friends of many years, going back to the seminary days, I was recently reminded of how lively the Word can be. After breakfast, we had devotions together. We read from 3 sources, including Guidepost, and then had prayer. Four people, with

Christ in the midst. It was empowering.

This week, the Presbyterian magazine called "Presbyterians Today" has published an entire issue on "Living the Faith Throughout the Week". It reports on the lives of many Presbyterians. It's encouraging to know that there are thousands of Presbyterians who are earnest about living the faith.

Finally, I'd like to make a case for the possible addition to liturgy in any Presbyterian church, or for that matter, in any Christian church. I like it when the person who has read Scripture announces, "This is the Word of God", and the resounding response of the congregation is "Thanks be to God".

Jesus is the Living Word. Drawing close to the Word, hearing and doing the word, empowers us for an abundant life.