

PSALM 29 AND MARK 14-11

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING THAT “ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS. THIS IS GENERALLY TRUE, AND YET WORDS CAN BE POWERFUL.

CARMEN LABERGE, FROM A CHRISTIAN RADIO STATION, POSTED ONLINE THOUGHTS BASED ON PSALM 19:14.

“LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O GOD.”

FOR THE START OF THE NEW YEAR, SHE OFFERS THIS FOOD FOR THOUGHT: “THINK FOR A MOMENT ABOUT THE WORDS YOU’VE SPOKEN IN THE LAST HOUR, THE LAST DAY, THE LAST WEEK.

HAVE THE WORDS OF YOUR MOUTH (THOSE YOU’VE SPOKEN OUT LOUD, THOSE YOU’VE SPOKEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA), AND THE MEDITATIONS OF YOUR HEART BEEN ACCEPTABLE IN LIGHT OF GOD’S HOLINESS AND OUR HOLY CALLING?”

HER QUESTION IS ONE THAT IS VALUABLE TO CONSIDER, SINCE SO OFTEN WE FOCUS MORE ON SINFUL ACTIONS, THAN ON WORDS WE SAY, EITHER INTENTIONALLY OR WITH TOO LITTLE THOUGHT.

BOTH OF TODAY’S SCRIPTURE READINGS REMIND US ABOUT THE POWER OF WORDS.

INDEED, WORDS MATTER, THEY HAVE TO POWER TO HURT OR HEAL, DISTRESS OR COMFORT, EXCITE OR CALM, CREATE OR DESTROY.

BUT THE BIBLE REMINDS US THAT NO WORDS MATTER MORE THAN THE WORDS SPOKEN BY THE VOICE OF GOD.

PSALM 29 COVEYS AN IMAGE OF A FIERCE THUNDER STORM, BROUGHT ON BY THE VOICE OF THE LORD GOD, THE CREATOR OF ALL.

IT IS MEANT TO DRAW OUR ATTENTION TO THE MAJESTY AND POWER OF GOD’S VOICE AND WILL.

THIS BRINGS TO MIND THE FACT THAT WE ALL ENCOUNTER STORMS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES. A COMMENTARY ON THE PSALM SAYS THIS:

“NONE OF US IS A STRANGER TO THUNDERSTORMS THAT STRIKE THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR LIVES AND BLOW AWAY OUR ILLUSIONS OF SECURITY.”

FOR EXAMPLE-THERE ARE STORMS IN NATURE, STORMS OF DISEASE LIKE THE PANDEMIC AND CANCER, AND SO MANY OTHER ILLNESSES.

WE ALSO FACE STORMS OF UNREST, VIOLENCE, BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS, THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE, ECONOMIC INSECURITY, AND MANY OTHERS KINDS AS WELL.

BUT IN THE MIDST AND AFTERMATH OF STORMS THE FINAL VERSES OF THE PSALM REMIND US THE LORD OUR GOD IS RULER OVER ALL.

THEY INVITE US TO PUT OUR FAITH IN THE MAJESTY AND THE POWER OF GOD’S VOICE, ALONG WITH THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

THE PSALMIST ASSURES US THAT GOD CAN BE TRUSTED, AND IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP.

THE VERSES REMIND US TO TRUST IN THE LORD, AND TURN TO THE ONE IN WHOM OUR ULTIMATE AND ETERNAL SECURITY IS FOUND.

THIS CALL IS EVEN MORE POWERFUL WHEN WE LOOK TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US THROUGH HIS SON.

THROUGH HIS BAPTISM, WE ARE REMINDED THAT JESUS BECAME ONE OF US

HE ALSO IDENTIFIED WITH US AND OUR SINFUL NATURE, ALTHOUGH SINLESS HIMSELF.

JESUS SUBMITTED TO THE BAPTISM OF JOHN AS A WAY OF DOING THIS.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS WAS MORE THAN JUST A SIMPLE CEREMONY HE UNDERWENT.

THE STORY CALLS OUR ATTENTION TO SEVERAL IMPORTANT THINGS.

FIRST, WE ARE AGAIN REMINDED ABOUT THE POWER OF WORDS AND THE MESSAGE THEY CONVEY.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S VOICE RANG OUT ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER DRAWING PEOPLE TO HIM.

HIS WORDS WERE POWERFUL AND AUTHORITATIVE TO MOST OF THOSE DRAWN TO HIS VOICE.

AND YET THE CHARISMATIC JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS ALSO HUMBLE, BECAUSE HIS WORDS WERE MEANT TO DRAW THE ATTENTION AND LOYALTY OF THE PEOPLE TO GOD.

THUS JOHN SPOKE AS THE SERVANT OF THE LORD TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR ANOTHER.

AND, THE BAPTIST, AS WE HEAR IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, REJECTED AND WARNED THOSE JEWISH LEADERS WHO CAME TO HIM WITH THEIR OWN AGENDA- THAT NEITHER HE NOR GOD WAS FOOLED.

IN JOHN, WE FIND AN EXAMPLE OF THE KIND OF SERVANTHOOD, WE ALSO MIGHT BE CALLED AND EMPOWERED TO.

IT IS THE ROLE OF SERVING GOD AND OTHERS WITH THE PURPOSE OF FULFILLING GOD'S AGENDA AND NOT OURS.

JESUS, OF COURSE PROVIDES US WITH AN EVEN GREATER EXAMPLE OF THIS, WHICH BEGAN WITH HIS BAPTISM.

WHEN JESUS, THE CARPENTER OF NAZARETH, WENT TO THE JORDAN TO BE BAPTIZED, HE SHED HIS VOCATION AS A CRAFTSMAN TO TAKE UP MANTLE OF TEACHER AND SAVIOR.

THE POWERFUL VOICE OF THE LORD GOD CONFIRMED THIS WHEN THE FATHER PROCLAIMED JESUS' TRUE IDENTITY, AND THUS HIS AUTHORITY TO SPEAK AND ACT GOD'S WILL.

THE BASIC PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S BAPTISM, AND BY IMPLICATION OUR OWN, CAN BE SUMMARIZED WITH THE LETTERS: "A-B-C".

FIRST, THE VOICE OF THE LORD AFFIRMED THAT JESUS IS BELOVED.

SECOND, THE VOICE OF THE LORD PROCLAIMED JESUS TO BE HIS SON, AND THUS HIS PLACE IN BELONGING TO GOD'S SELF, AS WELL AS TO US.

THIRD, THE VOICE OF THE LORD COMMISSIONED JESUS TO USE HIS POWER, AND THE BLESSING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TO GO FORTH AND DO THE FATHER'S WILL.

IN JESUS WE FIND THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD'S WORD, AND BY HIS BAPTISM, HIS HUMILITY AND AUTHORITY IS REVEALED.

LET US REMEMBER THIS AS WELL- THOSE OF US WHO ARE BAPTIZED ALSO ARE AFFIRMED AS THOSE LOVED BY GOD.

WE BELONG IN THE FAMILY OF GOD AS SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF JESUS.

AND WE ARE COMMISSIONED AND BLESSED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT TO DO GOD'S WILL IN THE WORLD.

THE WORDS OF ONE OF OUR HYMNS EXPLAINS IT THIS WAY:

"BAPTIZED IN WATER, SEALED BY THE SPIRIT, CLEANSED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST OUR KING; HEIRS OF SALVATION, TRUSTING THE PROMISE, FAITHFULLY NOW GOD'S PRAISES WE SING.

BAPTIZED IN WATER, SEALED BY THE SPIRIT, DEAD IN THE TOMB WITH CHRIST OUR KING, ONE WITH HIS RISING, FREED AND FORGIVEN, THANKFULLY NOW GOD'S PRAISES WE SING.

BAPTIZED IN WATER, SEALED BY THE SPIRIT, MARKED WITH THE SIGN OF CHRIST OUR KING, BORN OF THE SPIRIT, WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN, JOYFULLY NOW GOD'S PRAISES WE SING."

THUS IN OUR BAPTISM WE BEGIN TO FIND OUR IDENTITY IN JESUS, WHO IDENTIFIED WITH US THROUGH HIS BAPTISM.

AND AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE CALLED TO HUMILITY IN RECOGNIZING OUR NEED TO TRUST IN AND OBEY THE LORD.

FURTHERMORE, THROUGH OUR BAPTISM WE ARE AUTHORIZED AND EMPOWERED TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND DEED.

BUT UNLIKE JESUS, WE ARE ALSO CONTINUALLY CALLED TO REPENTANCE, WITH THE ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS FOR ALL WHO SINCERELY TURN BACK TO GOD.

THIS IS TRUE WHETHER WE ARE BAPTIZED AS INFANTS, CHILDREN, TEENS, OR ADULTS.

INDEED WE CONTINUALLY NEED TO RECOGNIZE WE SIN, AND WE MUST REPENT.

FOR REPENTANCE INVOLVES A RECOGNITION OF OUR SIN, ALONG WITH SORROW OR REGRET OF SIN, AND A TURNING AWAY FROM OUR SIN.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM SYMBOLIZES THIS TO AN EVEN GREATER DEGREE THAN THE BAPTISM OF JOHN DID.

JOHN ACKNOWLEDGED THIS BY DECLARING HIS PURPOSE WAS TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR ONE GREATER THAN HIM.

JESUS, AS WE KNOW, IS THE ONE TO WHOM JOHN POINTED, AND ALSO THE ONE TO WHOM WE ARE CALLED AND COMMISSIONED TO POINT OTHERS TO.

THIS IN FACT IS WHAT THE CHURCH IS ALL ABOUT. YES, WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER, BUT WE ALSO GATHER TO BE EMPOWERED TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WE GATHER AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN, OR ARE PREPARING TO BE, BAPTIZED INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

WE GATHER IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. AND THIS IS NO SMALL THING, BECAUSE IT IS THE BASIS UPON WHICH THE CHURCH LEAD BY JESUS IS FOUNDED.

THE ENDURANCE OF THE CHURCH, WE ARE REMINDED, IS NOT DUE TO ITS PHYSICAL BUILDING. NOR IS IT EVEN DUE TO THE WILL OF PEOPLE.

INSTEAD THE ENDURANCE OF THE CHURCH IS FOUND IN THE WORD AND WILL, AND ESPECIALLY THE- POWER OF GOD.

AND THE MOST AMAZING CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD'S POWER IS THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE REVEALED IN JESUS OUR SAVIOR.

YES, JESUS IS GOD'S WORD MADE FLESH, WHO CAME TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THAT GOD INTENDED.

BUT JESUS IS ALSO GOD'S DIVINE LOVE MADE FLESH, WHO CAME TO SHOW US THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE, BY DYING ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SAKE.

THE MIGHT OF JESUS' WORD OF LOVE WAS POWERFULLY UTTERED FROM THE CROSS WHEN HE SAID:

"FORGIVE THEM FATHER FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

THAT WORD WAS SEALED BY HIS DEATH AND AFFIRMED BY HIS RESURRECTION.

IT IS ALSO THAT WORD THAT PROVIDES SINNERS WITH A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

YES, THE VOICE OF JESUS, AND HIS POWERFUL WORD OF FORGIVENESS MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

NOR SHOULD HIS COMMAND TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART, MIND, AND STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OUR SELF BE FORGOTTEN.

SADLY, TOO OFTEN, IT SEEMS, CHRISTIANS DO NOT TAKE THOSE PARTICULAR WORDS OF JESUS SERIOUSLY.

TOO OFTEN WE SPEAK OR ACT AS IF LOVING OTHERS ONLY APPLIES TO THOSE WE LIKE, OR WHO AGREE WITH US, OR ARE LIKE US IN- RACE, RELIGION, NATIONALITY, POLITICS, AND OTHER WAYS.

THIS FAILURE TO REALLY LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF JESUS AND FOLLOW HIS COMMAND REMINDS US WHY HIS PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS IS SO NECESSARY AND POWERFUL.

IT IS ALSO WHY WE NEED TO BE WILLING TO REPENT AND SEEK FORGIVENESS WITH A DESIRE TO CHANGE OUR WAYS.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT GOD GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THIS, AS WELL AS HIS SPIRIT TO HELP US DO IT.

LET US PRAY:

GOD WHO WATCHES OVER US, OFFERING US LIGHT AND HOPE, BE WITH US THIS DAY AND EVERY DAY.

OUR WORLD IS IN THE MIDST OF MANY FORMS OF TURMOIL, HEAL US AND THIS WORLD, LORD.

HELP US TO REMEMBER YOUR HEALING, CLEANSING, AND CLAIMING LOVE FOR US.

IN HIS BAPTISM, JESUS' MINISTRY WAS INITIATED. HE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO YOU COMPLETELY AND WITHOUT RESERVATION.

HELP US TO DEDICATE OUR LIVES TO YOU, TO OFFER OUR BEST FOR YOU, TO BE OF SERVICE TO YOU BY SERVING IN YOUR WORLD.

THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD WE PRAY. AMEN

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