

POWER OF WORDS

In the Gospel lesson this morning, we read that Jesus commanded the demon to leave the man. Jesus spoke to the demon and the demon did what Jesus said. He didn't touch the man or the demon, Jesus spoke to him. His words were powerful. Powerful enough to make the demon who controlled this man for years, leave him.

The bible gives us many examples of the power of God's word. In Genesis, God said, "Let there be...." and there was... light, sun, moon, heaven, earth, stars, creatures of all kinds. God spoke and the world was created! Jesus healed many with just a word. Beginning in verse 40 we learn of Jairus' daughter who dies. Jesus brings her back to life by telling her to get up. In John 4:46, while in Cana, Jesus heals the son of a royal official who is in Capernaum by telling the man that his son would live. In John 5, Jesus heals a lame man by the pool in Jerusalem by saying to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Jesus' words have power! And so do ours.

Words have authority and power behind them. The power to harm and the power to heal. They are a two-edged sword. And like a sword it depends on how we use our words that will determine the outcome. Proverbs 12:18 says, "The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." (NIV) Are we reckless with our words? How often have you said something without thinking and then regret what you said? Remember the old nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words can never harm me?" We sang this as kids when someone called us a name or said unkind things about us. It was a way of ignoring them and not retaliating. But it isn't true. Words do harm. They can leave deep wounds that may never heal. Words like stupid, ugly, fatty, ethnic slurs and even jokes, can be harmful, especially when repeated over time. And it is not just the words that we say to others; it is also the words we say to ourselves. You look in the mirror and say, "I'm too fat or I'm not pretty enough. Or you tell yourself, I'm not smart or I can't do math or ... fill in the blank. We've all done it. Take a few moments to think of the words you used in the past 24 hours. The words you spoke to your children, spouse or co-workers. What about the words that ran around in your head about yourself. What do your words do? Do they hurt or heal?

The words we speak are a verbal expression of what we believe, of what's in our hearts. Matthew 15: 18 says, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles." And James 3 says, "...but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be." Out of our mouths we can bless and we can curse. Our words have power!

Have you used your words to bless or curse? I'm not talking about using curse words...you know those four letter words that polite people are not supposed to use. Hurtful words curse, they do not bless. They do not lift up, they put down. We need only reflect on the recent political campaigns to understand how words can be hurtful, inflammatory, and destructive. We demonize those who don't agree with us, look like us, act like us, or think like us. We have unpleasant names for people who are different from us culturally, ethnically, theologically, sexually. We, who call ourselves Christians,

are as guilty of using our words to hurt as non-believers. And sometimes we even use our faith, our religion, our religious beliefs, to justify the hurtful words we use! We create our own demons or problems that possess or control us like the man in our Gospel lesson by the things that we say. Our words are an expression of what we believe in our hearts, whether consciously or not. God hears what we say and gives us what we say. In Numbers 14:28, God tells Moses to tell the Israelites, "...As surely as I live, ...I will do to you the very thing I heard you say..." and in Matthew 7:7, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you..." Do we think that these verses don't apply to us as well! Every time we speak hurtful or negative things, we speak them to God and He gives us what we ask for. Why does He give us these negative things? I really don't know. But maybe it is to teach us a lesson. Sometimes we have to hit the ground before we understand what we need to hold on to. Maybe the Lord is letting us wallow in our problems so that we realize we can't solve our own problems, we don't have the answer. We are speaking the problem, not the answer. What is the answer? It is always the same...Jesus!

Jesus is the answer to every problem. He is the answer to changing our hearts, so that the words we speak are not words that hurt and cause pain, but encourage and heal. One that hears, "that's a good job" is more likely to do a better job next time, than if one hears, "you can't do anything right." If I say to myself that I can do math, then I have a better chance of being successful at math, than if I say I'm not good at math.

If we take all of our demons or problems, no matter how big or small, to Jesus, He will speak the words into our hearts that will command our demons to leave us, just as He did for the man in today's Gospel lesson. How do we do this? Through prayer. Prayer is nothing more than a conversation with our Lord and Savior, Jesus. A conversation is nothing more than words, the words we speak that express what is in our hearts. He will change our hearts if that is what is needed to serve His purpose. Because we are on this earth solely to serve His purpose, not our own.

Jesus used His words to encourage, teach, bring comfort, and heal. He gave the Apostles the power and authority to drive out demons, cure diseases, and heal the sick, and proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9, Mark 6, Matthew 10). Like Jesus, let us use the power of our words to bring healing to a sick world, love to a world full of hate, and compassion to an indifferent world. As his modern day disciples is that not what Jesus is calling us to do. We have the authority and the power!