

“Silence”- Year C Last of Epiphany

Words are important. Words spoken and unspoken. They can build up or they can tear down. They can bind up wounds or break them open, if not causing new ones to appear. I can remember being told by a few adults as a child and probably more as a teenager to “watch my words”. Often times because they knew I was about to say something, let us say a little sassy. As I have matured, I have learned the importance of trying to select just the right word. What is it exactly I am trying to convey? Is there a better word for what I am trying to message or communicate? Sometimes words fail me, too. Being witness to something beautiful or awe-inspiring can leave me feeling inadequate to articulate the experience.

We find in our Gospel reading this morning Jesus, James, John, and Peter trekking across the land. This coming in on the heels of Peter’s confession. Who do you say that I am, Jesus asked. The Messiah Peter answered. And if that wasn’t enough, Jesus then tells the disciples for the first time that he would endure suffering and not just suffering, but death. And on the third day he would rise again. Jesus ordered them to be silent about these things. Silence would be their partner in this matter. Waiting. Listening. Watching. Processing.

Eight days these four, Jesus, James, John, and Peter took to complete their journey to a mountain. We do not know what they talked about or didn’t talk about. I mean what is there really to say when you are told that your friend, the one you have followed for the last couple of years, your teacher tells you that he will die. Eight days to process, to take it all in, to contemplate all of this. I’m sure in silence.

The four then find themselves on the mountain top. Exhausted and in true disciple fashion, the disciples rest while Jesus prays. Then we are caught up in this cosmological unveiling. Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus about what was to happen next, Jesus’ departure or in greek exodus. A dual meaning word alluding to his death and the liberating work his death will do. Peter speaks but we are told he doesn’t know what he is saying. He is just trying to make sense of everything that he just witnessed. I have found myself becoming like Peter over the past week. Then, being swept in a cloud, more words shrouds them telling them that Jesus, the one who Peter just confessed as Messiah, the one whom they just spent eight days with trekking across the land, the one who was just seen talking with Moses and Elijah is God’s glory among them and they are to listen to him. Listen to his words, listen to what he tells you. Words that give life.

The cloud goes away and Jesus is found alone. After seemingly gathering themselves they leave and we are told they leave not talking about what they just lived through and experienced. Just silence, telling no one anything. A divine implementation of space. Silence is not something we are use to here in our time. We are subjected to constant stimuli. Phones vibrate, TVs flash, even when we sleep some use TVs or sleep machines to have background noise. Silence is almost painful. The disciples though didn’t have words to give to everything they have witnessed in the past two weeks. Time would be a friend.

They now find themselves coming down a mountain and we get to journey with them as we head into our season of Lent. We are invited to make this expedition in silence. This is why in our liturgy you will find a subdueness coming into our midst. We attempt to put away the extra not to punish or rub gravel through our hair but to create space. Space that we can find and listen to that still small voice that can only be heard when we are still and silent. We get to slow down from the busyness of everything and just be. In all her work, in all of the hustle and bustle, Mother Teresa bathed herself in silence. She understood the importance of emptying oneself. She said it this way:

In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence.

And if there ever was a time we need souls of prayer it is right now. Prayer may not seem like much in the face of war and transphobia. It may even seem like it is useless. However, when prayer comes from a soul of great silence, a soul that contemplates God’s unbridled love, mearcy, and irrevocable prejudice to abundant life, we can ask God to make all of that real again and again.¹ And in that unleashing of God’s want of this abundance of life, we are swept up and begin to see the ways that we can become Jesus’ hands and feet in this world. The same feet that stood and walked down that mountain top so long ago.

¹ Baker, Tony *Road to Emaus*

And so we come down the mountain and begin our walk towards Jerusalem, towards the cross where we will find that glory doesn't shine in brilliance but flows red.² We come down this mountain knowing how the journey will end, but we don't know what the journey will entail. Yes we will hear again the stories of Christ's journey to cross but our journey won't be the same, it is never the same. I wonder what would happen if we created space to be silent, to take in what is around us, revel in lesser, opened our hearts so they in due time can be filled up. Come down the mountain, watch, pray, and wait and you and the world through you will be transfigured.

² Carswell, Amber Sermon for Last of Epiphany 2015