

Church of the Covenant
August 30, 2015

TEXTS: Mark 7:1-8; James 1:17-27

Show Me

You would have to have been living in an underground cave for the last month not to know that there was a Republican Presidential Candidate debate. And if you were, I am tempted to ask if I can come stay with you. Regardless of how we may feel about particular candidates or things political, I think we could all agree that there were a lot of words that night. And the next morning. And the next day, and the next, and even still. Words, words, words – about issues (kind of), about each other. Words by the candidates, the interviewers, the commentators. Words, words, words – by newscasters, fact-checkers, op ed writers. Words, words, words, by talk radio hosts, bloggers and Facebook post-ers. Words to attack, words to defend. Words to put labels on people, and words put on as a mask to hide from people. Words as weapons, words as bait. Words that are our right and that are supposedly free – and yet words that so often go so wrong at such a cost. And we still have 14 more months until election time... where's that cave again?

Words have power – and yet, words seem empty. I mean, on any side of any given issue, whether it's words about the economy or unemployment, words about healthcare or homelessness, words about citizenship or justice or freedoms or rights – when it comes down to it, they are just words. They have power, yet they are empty, of that's all they are. Words.

Leap with me to another stage – not political, but theatrical. My Fair Lady to be exact. The story of Henry Higgins trying to put new and improved words into Eliza Doolittle to transform her – and to win a wager. And it worked – kind of, except when it didn't. Eliza was

frustrated and fed up with the words being thrown at her day and night. She ran out of the house, and bumped into poor Freddy, so smitten with her that he lavished her with words of love, reminding her of all the words in his daily letters and “AAOOOOAAOOOWWW!”. “WORDS, WORDS, WORDS, I’M SO SICK OF WORDS – I HEAR WORDS ALL DAY THROUGH, FIRST FROM HIM, NOW FROM YOU – IS THAT ALL YOU BLIGHTERS CAN DO?” And then, Eliza launches into her feisty song “Show Me” – “Don’t talk of stars, burning above, if you’re in love – show me.”

“Be doers of the word, not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

The writer of James tells us that this word thing is nothing new, and that it is far from contained in any political or theatrical arena. He is alerting the faith community to the power and the danger of words. There is danger if faith becomes confined into a series of truth claims – so that believing the words makes one faithful. There is danger in words of faith if they go in one ear and out the other, without taking hold and actually showing up in our lives. Faith isn’t agreeing with a set of beliefs – it is acting upon them. Faith isn’t rhetoric – it’s response. Faith isn’t even taking a stand – it is showing up and showing something for it. It is following the way of Jesus, living out the image in which we were created. How we actually live bears witness to what we actually believe.

You may not know this about the book of James – but it didn’t exactly receive a warm welcome into the Bible. In the 1st century, its authenticity was doubted. Eusebius in the 4th c. strongly contested its inclusion in the canon. Even up to the 16th century, Martin Luther dismissed it as an “epistle of straw”. It was distrusted because of its doctrine, or lack of -- and that it only uses the word, the name, of Jesus twice. And yet, if we think of Jesus’ teachings, what he actually called people to do – Jesus and James are singing the same tune. You give

them something to eat. Forgive. Don't judge. Heal. Welcome children. Give to the poor. Do something – show me.

In our text from Mark's Gospel today, Jesus is taking the Pharisees to task for what I call "majoring on the minors" – as they were hung up on how Jesus' disciples weren't doing it right- weren't following the traditions of the elders in terms of ceremonial hand-washing. Jesus throws some words of the prophet Isaiah back at them "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Lip service to God – faithfulness to the words of faith- isn't faith. As Jesus and James remind us – it's what you do. Show me. You know all those things – jewelry, pens, magnets, bumperstickers with WWJD on them? What's that stand for? What would Jesus DO. And if you think the point is to know the answer – you are somehow still missing the point. It is not just to know it – it is to do it. Show me.

And so while it is good that we are here – here isn't where the faithful action is. These words from James suddenly switch things up – Sunday is not the most important day of the week for Christians. David Lose, President of Lutheran Theological Seminary cites recent research studies that show that "there has never been a generation more eager to move from faith as a head-trip to faith as a way of life than the emerging generation." It is a generation less about the institutionalized words of faith in here, and more about the show me way of faith in life out there. All is not lost – unless, like those Pharisees, we insist on holding on to the same traditions and way of being church. David Lose would say this calls for re-orienting ourselves to see, as he says

that Sunday is not the pinnacle of the Christian week but actually was intended to serve and support our Christian lives the rest of the week. Sunday, that is, is the day we are immersed again in the word, have our sins forgiven, receive guidance and encouragement in our Christian lives, hear again the good news of God's goodness and mercy, and are called, commissioned, and sent once more into the world to work

with God for the health of the people God has put all around us. All of this puts tremendous importance on our daily lives and activities and actually hallows the everyday routines and responsibilities we often take for granted.

Think through your week to come. Your everyday routine and responsibilities. Places you'll be.

People you will be with. Opportunities or choices you'll face. How can you do faith, live a show

me faith, by listening? How can you do faith, live a show me faith, by caring for those who are

hurting and vulnerable? How can you do faith, live a show me faith by making a choice not to

live the way of the world that says to put ourselves first?

And now, I invite you into a little theological imagination – this one is a stretch, I'll admit.

Imagine God as Eliza Doolittle. Now join me in a little lyric re-write. Think of it as Lerner &

Loewe meets James. Your job is to watch the signs – come in with “show me”, when indicated –

and be prepared for a couple of “show me now's” – especially at the big finish. Imagine with

me – God hearing words upon words, those invoking God's name in preaching or political

rhetoric, day after day, nothing ever changing and “AAA OOOOAAA WWWW!!” And God says:

Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words!
I get words all day through
From the pulpit, from the pew – is that all you Christians can do?

Don't talk of God, high up above
Live out my love-
SHOW ME!

Don't offer words, doctrine or creed –
Where there is need –
SHOW ME!

Here you are together in the middle of a church
While there are those left in a lurch.
If you claim to follow me, then you should know by know
What matters is not if, but how!

Haven't you said, you're meant to service
So where's your nerve –
SHOW ME! SHOW ME!
Don't talk of how you wear my name – this isn't some kind of game
SHOW ME NOW!

Don't speak of love, don't offer praise
Live it in ways that
SHOW ME!

Don't talk of prayer, don't speak of call
Don't speak at all –
SHOW ME!

Here you are professing that you're following my word
Out there it's like you've never heard
Justice and compassion aren't just words for you to say,
To love me is to live them each day!

Don't talk of faith, and helping the poor
Look – there's the door,
SHOW ME! SHOW ME!

Act for the hungry, hurt or ignored – that is how I am adored!
SHOW ME NOW!

BENEDICTION/CHARGE

This came across my screen this week –

Let us feed the hungry
House the homeless
Stop the killing
And provide medicine for the sick.
When we have accomplished that,
We can sit around and argue about religion.

So let's go forth to do our faith, as living answers to the question What would Jesus Do --