

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from
heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the
earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my
mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Is 55:10–11.

I find it edifying that the editors of the Bible, as they were sorting and assembling the many different sources that would become the canon that we know, began at the beginning – a pretty good place to start, as the Von Trapps could attest to – and that at the beginning- or, more precisely – in the beginning it was the word which God sent forth that contained the creative power to call into being all things that were and are and ever more shall be.

The image on this morning's bulletin cover is meant to convey this, with sound waves transformed into mountain peaks.

In a similar fashion, in the gospel according to John, as the evangelist is recounting the life, death,

resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, he frames the story of the Messiah using the very same formula as in Genesis as he tells us that in the beginning was the word and that the word was *with* God and that the word *was* God.

Both writers in the era of the Old Testament and the New understood both the venerability and the primacy of the word.

And here in this snippet from the week's lectionary-appointed reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, we hear another powerful testimony to this reality that comes straight from the source, God himself.

Providentially, this past Monday night at our session meeting, the devotional I shared with the

elders at the start our gathering was about words – and that was even prior to my consultation of the lectionary to see what the suggested preaching texts were for this week. I was inspired to present that devotional based on a text from the book of the prophet Isaiah, the same book that happens to be the source of today’s Old Testament lectionary text.

So, on Monday, I read for the five others in the room a short bit of dialogue which was taken from the script of the very first scene in the very first episode of the Chosen, the series we’ve been watching during the Adult Sunday School hour just preceding worship. One of many interesting creative choices the writers made was to begin their entire gospel harmonization story with dialogue

between a young Mary Magdalene and her ailing father, a bit prior to the birth of Jesus. As many children experience, she was having trouble sleeping one night, on account of being afraid, afraid of something she really couldn't put her finger on. Her anxiety led her to get up and go to her father for comfort. When she explains what's wrong, her father puts his arms around her and gives her a big hug. Then he asks her, "What do we do when we are scared?" And she responds, "we say the words". To which her father adds, "Adonai's words. From the prophet..." he then pauses and waits for his little girl to chime in, "Isaiah."

“From the prophet Isaiah, right.” And then he begins to recite what we know as chapter 43 verse one. “Thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel: fear not...” and he encourages her to finish the sentence, which she dutifully does, “For I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

These words have the power to cast out fear. Whether you are a little girl Afraid of some unknown entity that keeps you from sleep or whether You are old and afraid of some all-too-familiar, anxiety -producing foe, the words still possess the power to cast out fear.

They do so because of their unique origin. There are no other comparable words in all the world. For these are not just words but they are, as astutely noted by Mary's father, The Words. These are the words of Adonai, of God, which are preserved for us in the pages of holy scripture, The Bible, The book. Not just *a* book, but *the* book with The Words.

And of these words we have God's promise here in the 55th chapter of this same book of the prophet Isaiah “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty,

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,

and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

What God says is what he does, and what God promises always comes to pass. There's a guarantee you can take to the bank. A more secure deposit than stocks, bonds, mutual funds, or precious metals. The word of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. And it is powerful. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews put it, in our New Testament reading of earlier, “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow...”

God created everything simply by calling it into existence by speaking the words of creation, and it was. And God has called into existence the new

creation through his word, the word made flesh, his son, our savior, Jesus Christ.

There's a new movie, set to be released later this month, that is a sensationalized semi-historical biography of Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb. He began his work under the auspices of the Third Reich, which were quick to see the potential of developing and deploying such a weapon. Of course, this nation, while slower to innovate, were the ones who would sponsor Oppenheimer's work and bring it to fruition. But since unleashing this unparalleled destructive force, as a race, we have subsequently harnessed that force for peaceful ends, as well.

These are the things that I've been thinking about this week and they have brought me to a place of reflection- of reflection on the Power of God's words and His words that have been granted to us by God.

We have been given an extremely powerful gift in words. It has been said that the pen is mightier than the sword and the words of God are the mightiest ever to have been penned.. The apostle James, who recognized the great power of words for drawing people to Christ, lamented man's propensity for abusing the power of words when he chastised his fellow believers saying, of the human tongue,
“9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of

God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.”

And so I am reminded of the awesome responsibility that has been entrusted to us. What we say does matter. And most importantly, what we say about God matters greatly. As I said a couple of weeks ago one of my pet peeves is all the irreverent talk of God which has become so commonplace. We ought not to be part of the problem. We have a duty and responsibility to speak plainly yet carefully about God as we, the church, we are his body. If the body is not speaking in harmony with the head, we are doing something wrong.

I am also reminded how emerging technology has amplified once small voices. No longer do you have to be a pseudo-celebrity or spend a bunch of money to secure a syndicated talk show in order to reach a large and diverse range of consumers. Nowadays it is less expensive and less complicated than ever to have your words heard by a prospective global audience.

As the words spoken and sung right here are being disseminated to hundreds of listeners in dozens of foreign countries it is testament to this new reality. And it calls for a renewed sense of reverent responsibility. Words have power. And words about God – words of God have unparalleled power.

In the days when Josiah ruled as King over the Judahites and Hilkiah was the chief priest, there was uncovered a copy of a lost collection of scrolls – together a book. They were the Holy Scriptures which the people of previous generations had parted ways with. When they were discovered, an investigation was launched on behalf of the King, as he said: “Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great *is* the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.”

This King understood the power of the words of God and fear and trembling seized him when he realized how these words had been dismissed and neglected by his people. He was to order the people to gather in a sacred assembly to hear what had been written long ago and to undertake a ritual of confession and repentance to avoid condemnation and the accompanying Divine punishment of a neglected and spurned God.

Henceforth, the words were not to be ignored, but heeded. Henceforth, the words were not to be forgotten, but recited. Henceforth, the people of God would remember their heritage and repeat His words to their children and their children's children,

as was depicted happening with Mary Magdalene's father and his young daughter.

Henceforth, all believers, disciples of Christ are obliged to speak truthfully yet carefully of our God. For words spoken as ambassadors of Jesus are to their hearers words about God and they are through the speakers the words of God and are therefore endowed with incredible power. Power which God has promised will fulfill His Divine purposes, as His words shall never return empty. And for that we may truly say, thanks be to God.