

## **Word and Deed, Faith and Action.**

Readings: Psalm 33:4-9 and James 2:14-26.

When I was on loan to St David's, I had a phone call from a family going through a rough patch and so I asked Louise, the Food Basket lady, if she could put together a food parcel for them. Unfortunately the basket had just been taken to the Plunket Nurse for someone else and it was empty.

I'm not sure about Holy Trinity but the food basket at St David's takes several weeks to fill up again, and sure enough, when I got to church on the Sunday morning, the food basket held just one packet of Weetbix.

However, and this is where it gets exciting, because God had been at work and at the end of the service Louise offered me a food parcel for that family. Not only was the food basket full to the top, and it is a big one, but there was also an overflowing banana box as well. Sometimes what seems like a small step for us, God turns into a huge blessing for someone else.

As Christians, we are people of the word, and that is because we have the Book of the Word, the Bible. Word and Spirit are the two ways God communicates with us; they are the major source of our confidence as we seek to minister to others, just as St David's ministered to that family the other month.

Isaiah 55:8-11 tells us:

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it spring forth and sprout ... 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.*

We can trust God to use us to do his work, even if sometimes, like putting an item in the food basket, we feel we aren't doing much. For each person who put something in the basket that day at St David's, had no idea how God would multiply it so quickly and use it for his purpose.

We use words in many different ways; for information, description, persuasion, instruction, discussion and for relationships. And because we use words in these ways, we assume God does the same. But it is much more complex than that; for if words are the clothes that thoughts wear, surely we should expect the words of God to

do much, much more than our words do – for his thoughts are far more complex than ours. (1 Cor. 1:25) *The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom.*

When the OT speaks about the Word of God it uses the word *dabar* which has a double meaning. It means 'word', but at the same time it also means 'deed'. So for the OT writers, every time the word *dabar* is used to describe the word of God, it is both as a word and a deed, not either/or but both word and deed, God's words actually do something – they breathe life.

And that is summed up in our reading from Psalm 33; the word of the Lord is true, dependable, righteous, and constant love; but it also created the cosmos, gathered the seas together, shut up the ocean depths, and created our world. Our words, spoken prayerfully, in the will of God, help to fulfil his purposes; word and deed, faith and action working together.

Let's look at today's NT reading from James on faith and action. It begins in verse 14 with quite a challenge. *'What good is it for people to say that they have faith if their actions do not prove it?'*

How do we live out our faith? Our deeds are our response.

I'm sure, just like me, you recognise opportunities after they have passed. How many times have we thought, "I should have..." or "why didn't I...?" Is it that we weren't in 'God space' at the time, or that it would have put us outside our comfort zone? But what if we were listening for God's prompting? Would that have made a difference?

James challenges us to see that faith must have action or it is dead. What is faith if it is alone? If we have faith, we must act. The two go together as bread and butter, or bacon and eggs, just as an aeroplane needs two wings to fly, as Anne and Kevin Roberts said when they were here last year, so we need word and deed, faith and action.

Abraham was a righteous man, a man whose faith in God was lived out in his life. Can any of you imagine offering one of your children as a sacrifice on an altar? It doesn't bear thinking about, yet Abraham was willing to do that as a response to his faith in God. And look how God rewarded him!

Abraham was a righteous man, but what about Rahab? She was a prostitute. Not the sort of person we usually associate as a person of faith, yet God looked into her heart; God used what little faith she had to save the spies sent out to check the Promised Land, an action that led to fulfilling God's purposes for the whole Israelite nation at that time.

Like putting an item in the food basket, the little bit Rahab did was enough for God to use for a greater purpose. We have no idea how God will use the little we do for a greater good.

Which begs the question, ‘What would God do if we gave him more than just an item in the food basket?’

The first mention of God speaking in the Bible comes in verse 3 in Genesis 1. *Then God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light.* God speaks and something happens. For six days God spoke and the universe was created. God spoke of light and dark, sky, land and sea, sun and moon, then he filled his creation with birds and animals, grass and trees, man and woman, and as he spoke they became.

If the word of God, *dabar*, contains a powerful energy which can make things happen, then, in order to minister effectively to others, we need to claim that same energy. If we want to speak the Word of God and expect things to happen, we must have faith that when we speak, our words will acquire some of his power.

A visiting preacher was at a church in Hounslow – in the UK – where he sensed the strong presence of the Holy Spirit all around and within the church. He asked the vicar how long it had been like that and the vicar told him, “about thirty years”. He went on to explain that it started the day Lottie died. Lottie, then 63, was a faithful church member, and one Sunday she was sitting in her usual place in the front row. During the service, Lottie died where she sat. Her body was carried out to the back of the church and a doctor and two nurses who were in the congregation confirmed that she was clinically dead. But the vicar, who had never done such a thing before, took her by the hand and said, “Lottie, you can’t go – in the name of Jesus, come back!” and she did.

The vicar finished the story by pointing to where Lottie, now 93, was sitting and suggested the visitor might like to go and talk to her. Lottie confirmed the story to him and added that, ever since then all her arthritis had gone. “The last thirty years have been the best of my life,” she told him. All because the vicar had used the power of God’s words to bring Lottie back from death.

And did you notice, the vicar did not use fancy words, he just spoke from his heart, “Lottie, you can’t go – in the name of Jesus, come back!” No fancy or lengthy words, simply claiming the power available to us all through faith.

Believers are part of God’s story and this means thinking about what it means to be a follower of Jesus; we are words woven into the narrative of God’s story. We can begin to speak with power, the power of *dabar* because we have become brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Word who created and sustains the world; we are joined to him on

one vine and in one body. Together we are woven into sentences that carry the message of the gospel itself. We have that power!

But none of this is easy. To be a Christian is to learn to live in a story you haven't chosen. You might have chosen to follow God, but you have no idea where that is going to lead you until God reveals that path to you. There is a cost to following Christ, but it is the only way to be really real, really alive! Not reality as we might like it to be, but reality as it actually is.

Take Martin for example. "Martin was a partner in a firm of solicitors. He wrote, 'About 16 years ago I was completing my daily reading when a verse, Genesis 26:18 leapt off the page in a way I had never experienced before: *"Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up."* All I could see in that moment were the churches across Britain ... and all I could feel was the intense conviction that God wanted to remake them all as the provision of living water for his people. I understood in that second what it was I was called to ..."<sup>1</sup> This led him to work for ReSource helping to rebuild churches throughout the world. By being tuned in to the Holy Spirit, Martin was able to find his true purpose in life.

Have you ever wondered if you are doing enough to further the Kingdom of God? About a year before she died, my mother confessed to me that she felt she hadn't done all she could, and we talked about the example she had set for both her family and friends and how her very lifestyle reflected her commitment to God. Yet, she still felt she could have done more, and she went to her grave with that nagging feeling hanging over her. Do you ever feel like that? Do you have dreams – possibly even great dreams – of making a difference that are unrealised? You may think they are unrealistic, or impossible, and there are people who will tell you so - don't listen to them! If you step out in faith, God will use you to further his work.

I have told stories today of people whose lives made a difference, from mighty Abraham, a man of incredible faith, to Rahab the prostitute, Martin who gave up a good job to help rebuild churches, and even Lottie – what sort of impact would her return to life have had on others? Apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit hovering around for 30 years, which must have had a huge impact on her fellow worshippers, what about people outside the church?

Word and deed, faith and action; our Christian life demands far more from us than we can provide on our own. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit, just as that Church in Hounslow had the presence of the Holy Spirit hovering over and within it for thirty years. It is by means of the Holy Spirit that we can anticipate success. The Holy

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<sup>1</sup> *The Word in The Wind*, Alison Morgan. P 271

Spirit waits ready to live through us, to empower us, to energise us, to help us to do all that God requires of us. When we ask Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to help us, we can be sure he will. He will help us to fulfil God's purpose for our lives. Jesus will intercede to God the Father for us, and if we listen for the Holy Spirit to direct us he will reveal God's word to us and then guide our steps in God's ways.

There are three ways he does this, first, he uses scripture. David prayed, "*Show me your ways O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; on you I wait all day.*" (Psalm 25:4-5)

Second, the Holy Spirit leads us by inward impressions – that still, small voice – we simply *know* God wants us to do something. That is the Holy Spirit confirming with our spirit that it is the right thing to do.

Third, the Holy Spirit uses our circumstances. It doesn't matter who we are, God can and does use us to further his purpose.

God used prostitutes and tax collectors; he used the death – and then life – of Lottie; he used people of great faith like Abraham, but he also used people of little faith, like you and me. People who felt they had nothing to give, were too old like Sarah, too young like Timothy, too uneducated like the fishermen Jesus turned into disciples and the list goes on. But if we pray to God – calling on *dabar*, the power of word and deed – then God will use us too. Are we willing to allow God to change the way we think, the way we pray, the way we act? Are we prepared to give our fears, our dreams and our very lives to God to use as he sees fit?