

**GOOD FRIDAY**

**The Rev.  
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John 18:1-19:42 Good Friday 2012  
The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker

Words Are All I have

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."*

The Word became flesh and lived among us...This is where it all started. Long before this horrifying moment in which Jesus gives up his last breath, we are told that the Word that spoke the very Creation into being took on mortal flesh so that we might truly know the taste, the feel and the very essence God's love.

There had already been---- as there continues to be an alarming surplus of little "w" words that attempt to convey the true nature of God. And many of these words are truly fresh off the breath of inspiration like those we heard earlier in the service:

*"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds...and*

*'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.'*

*'Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.'*

But far too many of the little "w" words which we author in God's name are simply glib or even dangerous attempts to package God as fast food. We are in very real danger when the Bread of Life is offered as no more than a holy Happy Meal---something that is easy to get for very little cost.

We often invoke the name of God and the gifts of forgiveness, mercy and grace as though they have little more value than the free toy at the bottom of the box, something we can throw away with little or no thought after our initial interest quickly fades.

Standing here today in the presence of the cross it is impossible to miss the true and very high price that comes with loving others as God loves us. The empty words we are often content to consume around our lives of faith while utterly failing to let the true (capitol W) Word transform us can leave us feeling bloated and regretful.

We are in constant danger of thinking that our choices to feed on the emptiness of easy answers means that the Word of God is not the answer to what ails us after all.

Let's face it, in this day and age the whole enterprise of trusting words to mean what they say or to serve as a medium of trusting and loving relationship is in crisis.

For those of us who confess a God we call the Word made flesh, the dangerous practice of manipulating words in order to manipulate people is even greater. From TV commercials to political rhetoric to personal promises of fidelity and trust---words seem to flow with little or no thought or care for the truth.

That is in part exactly how the human family betrays the trust and love of Jesus, the Word of God, by taking him, twisting him, attempting to manipulate him---- constantly trying to bend him to suit our own purposes. This is precisely how he came to this regretful day on the hill they called the place of the skull.

But the Word made flesh is in fact God's final word and this Word cannot be silenced even by death. In Jesus God has spoken the Word of truth that sets the captives free. God has opened God's mouth and unleashed Abundant Life for all. We may choose to reject this Word, but it is there none the less---it is all ours should we but decide to speak its truth.

In this great mystery the Word of God became a child, a person, a living, loving, lifting, teaching, blessing, healing forgiving, hurting, dying and rising again miracle and inscrutable fact. God's speech ceased to flow from the mouth of prophets and became a human being who still has the power to bring life out any death we suffer.

God is grace and truth. Jesus is the Word of God given hands and feet. Little "w" words *about* God are sure to get us lost; they cannot rescue us when we are in danger.

If we are caught in a house on fire, we need more than someone to tell us where the door is located. We do not need someone to give us directions to the nearest window. And as much as I loathe to admit it, we do not need someone to preach us a great sermon describing the route to the fire hydrant.

We need more than someone to give us a set of directions to be applied in case of an emergency. When we are caught in a fire our lungs are filled with poisonous vapors. Our eyes are irritated and red with smoke. Our bodies are sick, our legs are weak, and our consciousness is fading fast. We need human hands to reach us and pull us out of the fire.

We need human hands to carry us when we cannot walk; we need human flesh to lift us when we cannot help ourselves. At such times we need a Christ far more than a creed. We do not need a *plan* of salvation, but a savior.

God knows that we do not need somebody to point the way out of our danger, but someone to *be* the Way to freedom and life.<sup>1</sup> And that is what God gave us and that is who Jesus is; even as he hangs bloody and beaten and broken on the cross he--- is still the Way, the truth and the Life.

The cross is our salvation, it does have the power to make us holy, but not in that easy breezy way that the cheap grace of a fast food faith would pretend. What the cross does, as Richard Rohr says, is “open the gates of heaven by closing off our loyalties to hell. It “buys” us the truth, which is an increasingly rare commodity in this world

Through the cross Jesus pays the high price of truth and love---but not so that we would not have to---that is false preaching. He paid the ultimate cost so that we would know that in fact there *is* a great price to pay for real Truth and real Love.<sup>2</sup>

He shows us that through the power and mystery of God’s love for us we can pay that price and still live to talk about it---even if we die in the process.

And what is that price? Well...as we can see today that price is no less than *everything*; it is giving everything we have to give so that others might also discover the Way to freedom and Abundant life. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Preaching God’s Transforming Justice*, Otto, Andrews, Otto-Wilhelm, eds.

<sup>2</sup> *Radical Grace*, Richard Rohr, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995.