

Sept. 15, 2024 Homecoming Sunday

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 50: 4-9; Psalm 116; James 3: 1-12; Mark 8: 27-36

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Who do you say I am? [Mark 8: 27]

When I was in seminary, I was disturbed about the conversation between Moses and the Burning Bush. [Exodus 3:13-14] Moses says, *'Who are you? What's your name?'* The response in Hebrew is *'I am who I am.'* Or it might be translated, *'I am who I am becoming.'* And I said, *"That's not an answer. I can't work with that. What is that supposed to mean?"*

Now, a few years later, I'm a little more satisfied with that response, because the words are pointing at a Truth. They're pointing us towards a Mystery.

Jim loaned me a book called, Words as Eggs [Russell Lockhart]. (I haven't finished it. It's really good.) Each one has a shell, a yoke, a taste—and can spark imagination. Words really matter. Words can soothe and heal—and they can sting.

What words do you like to hear about yourself—in front of you, or behind your back?

What words don't you like to hear about yourself, in front of you, or behind your back? They can hurt.

James [the writer of the Epistle of James] today is on a roll, isn't he, about this unbridled tongue? It's a weapon. It's poison. It's fire, and it reveals the inner truth of the person who's speaking

What if we only spoke what we were given to say? This is an old monastic practice. What if you only spoke words that matter, that you knew you'd been given to say for the good of others, and that's the only time you spoke. The world would be a lot quieter, wouldn't it? And a lot more sane.

Gandhi had a *'Day of Silence'* every week. Every week. Should we try to practice that for one day just once? Just once—not a word all day—once.

I don't hear any takers... Okay, what would happen? We would say what we mean and mean what we say. Does anything else need to be heard?

Isaiah listened for the voice of Truth. He listened from beyond and within. He listened for the voice of Truth, and became a vessel of Truth, who was immediately rejected. You see—there's no smooth sailing for servants of Truth.

We, like everybody else, we just want calm waters, don't we.? *'Is it too much to ask just to have a little calm in our life?'* And then this voice says, *'You know those waters are polluted, don't you, and they stink.'* *'Why? Why, why do you have to say that?'* *'Well, because there are wars and endless wars, and then those preparations for wars, and the maltreatment of the innocent'*—and we say, *'Yeah, but it's always been that way.'* Right?

But in the modern world, that's become a dogma—*'You can't change anything. Come on, we weren't born yesterday. It is what it is.'* God, what a lie! But very popular. *'It is what it is.'* There's no accountability for our speech, for our actions. There's no stewardship of the common good. We've reached our limit, haven't we? We're done trying to change anything. *The vested interests—social, political, military, religious, economic— they're too big to fail. They're too big to budge, right? Give up. Give up—because they are the Law. That's who the law protects. They are the Law. And what they suggest is, 'let's just sort of dismiss and denigrate, you know, reduce and and reject those voices. I mean, who needs them, right? I mean, who are we talking about here anyway? Steven Biko, Mudzunga and Tshenu Farisani, Martin King, Archbishop Romero, Alexei Navalny. I mean, you know, they're good people—but do we need all that stuff? Those prophetic voices. Do we need that?'*

Words of Truth cannot coexist with lies or ignorance, because they cut too deep. They separate bone from marrow, bone from Spirit. They unmask the powers that be—and all the powers want is to look good, and to have nice words spoken about us.

But words of Truth threaten, because they aren't just an intellectual critique. They are a summons to a new way of life. Jesus is summoning us to discipleship—and that word of Truth judges the judges, who think they're in charge—because life is not a game of winners and losers. It is investing in the integrity and the dignity of every human being, especially those condemned,

those written often written out of History. It starts there, but it is also about the Integrity of those who condemned.

'Who do you say I am?' asked Jesus. *'Watch your tongue,'* Peter says. *'The Messiah.'* [Jesus says]

But Jesus is the wrong kind of Messiah. He is not what we expect. He's not abstract. (That's the nice part of our Creed, you know. It says about Jesus—*'He suffered, died, and was buried.'* Isn't that nice? Totally abstract.)

It doesn't say what he lived for, what he died for, what he was teaching, what the wisdom was about, why he put us at risk, and why he's murdered. Why? Because he is the Love that overthrows the existing order so that no one is excluded. This isn't a religion. This is about a way of living. So, he says *'Pick up your cross, follow me. Make it a way of life.'* He says *'Lose your life for my sake.'*—and we say that contradicts everything we know—and he says, *'That's right, because you're trapped inside a way of death. Come to life! Because what can you exchange for your life?'*

Crucifixions and Resurrecting Love are never abstract:
Speak words of Truth. Do deeds of mercy and love.
Ubuntu—a person is not a person without other persons.

For Christ's sake— and for our sake. Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.