

Epiphany 4C, 2012

Text: Mark 1:21-28

Title: The Power of Words

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“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Or so the saying goes. It’s wrong of course. Often words hurt the most. What hurts more than “I hate you” spoken by your own child, or “You’re fired” or “I’m filing for divorce.” What hurts more than “I never want to see you again”?

Words hurt, more so than any sticks or stones, especially when spoken by someone dear to us.

We can even use our words as weapons, to attack other people. The presidential campaign is heating up, and words are being thrown around in debates and commercials trying to tarnish the image of the opponent.

How many times have you been guilty of this? How many times have you said things because you knew they would hurt? How many times have you said things, even true things, in order to tear someone else down? You don’t have to be a politician to do this.

We do battle with words. We wage wars with words. And, oddly enough, so does Jesus.

Jesus’ words are strong and powerful. His words are a sword, and He uses them to do battle even with Satan Himself.

Today in the gospel lesson, Jesus goes toe to toe with an unclean spirit, and His only weapon is His words. All Jesus has to do is say the words, and the demon comes out. The demon is no match for Jesus’s words. The demon submits to Jesus’ words.

Jesus’ words are like a sharp sword. In Hebrews we read, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged **sword**, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

God’s Word has a way of cutting right into you, like a sword. Paul calls the Word of God, “the sword of the Spirit.”

On Pentecost, Peter got up to preach. He talked about Jesus, how Jesus fulfilled prophecy and came to bring life. But when he got to the end of his sermon he accused those people of crucifying their Lord. And it says, “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

That’s what God’s word does, it cuts us to the heart. This is particularly the role of God’s Law. God’s word accuses you.

When you hear God's Law it cuts into you like a knife in your heart.

God says, "Love me with all your heart, mind and soul, with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself. Be perfect and holy, just like I am perfect and holy."

God says, "Trust in me more than anything else, more than money, more than friends, more than the government. Have faith in me alone."

God says, "Don't use My name to curse and swear, but use it in prayer, praise and thanksgiving."

God says, "Devote at least one day each week to study and listen to my word, and do so gladly."

God says, "Honor and obey your parents and all those in authority over you."

God says, "Don't hurt or harm other people but defend and speak well of them."

God says, "Don't look lustfully at anyone you're not married to, don't even think about having sex with them, but love and honor your spouse."

God says, "Don't try to get things that don't belong to you, but help other people with their homes and businesses."

God says, "Don't tell lies and gossip about other people, but defend them and speak well of them."

God says, "Don't desire things that aren't yours or people and relationships that you don't have, but to be content with what you have."

That is God's word to you. And that cuts straight to your heart. Think of all the times you've disobeyed. Think of all the times you've failed. Think of all the times you've acted out of hate or anger or fear rather than love.

When you do these things, you not only hurt yourself, you not only hurt those you love, your sins hurt God. Your sins are the reason why Jesus died. You are the one who killed Jesus.

Those words cut into you. They're not easy to hear.

But Jesus cuts into you for a reason. He doesn't cut into you to destroy you, but to heal you.

Jesus' word is sharp, but it's like a surgeon's scalpel. Just as a surgeon cuts into you to remove dead or diseased tissue, so Jesus' words cut into you to remove the portions of your life that are diseased with sin, to get rid of the evil that is growing inside of you.

Today, Jesus' words cut into the man in the synagogue and actually remove the demon that is infecting this man. When Jesus casts out the demon, it's like a surgeon cutting into you to remove a parasite like a worm or a bug living inside of you, sucking your life from you.

Jesus' words cut into this man and pull that demon out of him.

Even if you don't have any demons inside of you, Jesus' words still cut into you for a purpose, to cut out the sin from your life, to remove these cancerous behaviors that will ultimately kill you. Jesus' law cuts into you to remove your sin and its effects from your body.

And that's not all. After Jesus cuts into you, He doesn't leave you open on the operating table. Jesus' gospel, the good news, comes in to stitch you back together, to bind up your wounds and to heal you.

Jesus not only takes out your old evil heart, but he puts a new right living heart within you. Jesus gives you a transplant, giving you His own heart, His own life and breath. Jesus transfuses you with His own blood to bring you healing. And He does all this with His words.

Words are powerful things.

Just as words can hurt and cut and kill, words can bring peace and hope and life.

Think of how words can uplift you and encourage you. When you hear words like, "Welcome home." "Great job." "I love you." Those words build you up.

Even more so with Jesus' words. Jesus says, "You are mine." "You are forgiven." "I love you, I died for you, and you will be mine forever." "This is my body given for you." "This is my blood, shed for you." "Peace be with you."

Jesus speaks two words, Law and Gospel. The Law cuts into you, accusing you, ultimately killing you. The Gospel binds up your wounds, healing you and giving you life.

Words are powerful things, and Jesus' words are most powerful, because they bear His Spirit.

When Jesus had cast out the Spirit, word spread across the whole region about him. People were amazed that someone could do so much with just words. So spread the word about Jesus, and what He can do with His powerful, strong words.