

“When Words Are Not Enough”

God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along...making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans.”

Rom. 8:26-27

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Prayer: When we don’t know what to say - you are there.

When words fail us - you are there.

When we open our mouths to speak and only tears of confusion, anger, and grief fall - you are there.

Message:

It has been said there are one million fifty seven thousand three hundred seventy nine point six words in the English language. That is a January 1, 2020 estimate. Of course depending on your source, that number decreases to as low as a quarter of a million words. Either way, that is a lot of verbs, nouns, adverbs, prepositions, cultural slang, synonyms, antonyms, and metaphors.

You would think with so many choices a person wouldn’t have any trouble at all finding the word or words to express any given thought, idea, direction, question, or opinion. You would think with 1, 057, 379.6 words to choose from, a person could find the right word to capture any given emotion, reaction, inspiration, or observation. Whether it be good, bad, right, wrong, or somewhere in between.

Yet, most of us know it doesn’t work that way. How many of you have ever found yourself at a loss for words and not because you can’t remember or recall the word, but because any word you try to use would not say what you want it to say. For example, have you ever been at a loss for words at the sight of something beyond beautiful; A newborn baby, a once in a lifetime sunset, the sound of your loved one’s voice? How many

of you have ever come up short with words when deep down feelings find their way to the surface of your soul; the utter brokenness of love lost, the anger and rage of an injustice, the unconsolable thoughts and feelings attached to the question “why”? How do you explain the emotion, thought, or spiritual connection upon hearing a piece of music or seeing a piece of art that speaks to the very core of who you are without a single word?

At the very least we have a quarter of a million words to choose from and at that most over one million. AND YET...

There are situations, circumstances, and experiences when words simply do not come; when words fail us, or when words are simply not enough. It is in those moments friends, we can say more than we might ever know. It is in those moments the Spirit of God transforms and transcends our limitations and reveals a deep and abiding connection to God.

That is the message of Paul in our passage for today. We continue to walk the path through some of Paul’s finest and most significant writing, the eighth chapter of Romans. As we do, we walk the most foundational teachings of what it means to follow Christ - what it means to live life outside the tomb of death, fear, shame, doubt, or brokenness, what it means to realize we are marked for a life with Christ through the Holy Spirit, and last week, Pastor Andy spoke of how Christ in our suffering we find something greater than our pain and greater than ourselves; we find the hope and promise of the Holy Spirit to bring about God’s greater purpose of restoration.

That is the strength and beauty of Romans chapter 8. It encompasses what is called a lived theology. Paul lays out what living for and with Jesus looks like and sounds like. He explains how we, as followers of Jesus, as the church, as people of God, are living expressions of who and what Jesus was, is, and will be. Lived theology is a theology (a

belief, a way of thinking, a way of looking at, approaching, and understanding God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit) that is played out and revealed in what we do and how we do it; in what we say and how we say it; in what and how we live our life.

Today we pick up again in chapter eight, verses 26-30. Hear the assurance with which Paul speaks of how the Spirit finds the words we cannot, prays on our behalf when we can't find a way, and the unwavering certainty that Paul expresses God's ultimate promise to work for good in all things for those who love, follow, trust, believe, and have hope in God.

Read Text - Romans 8:26-30 The Message (MSG)

26-28 Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

29-30 God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun.

Considered to form one of the most important passages on prayer in the whole New Testament, verses 26-27 are the foundation of understanding just how close the Spirit of God is with us; how in tune the Spirit is to us, and how the Spirit is the most central and most underestimated being of the Trinity.

It is the Spirit that intercedes on our behalf when words are not enough. It is the Spirit that takes our very breath, our every tear, and every ounce of anger, fear, and confusion and finds the exact word, phrase, sigh, groan, or heartbeat, carries it to God when for whatever reason we can't, and gives it to God as our heartfelt message. C.H. Dodd describes it this way, "prayer is the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us" (Barclay 111). It is the Spirit that holds together our lived theology.

I don't know about you but I have had my moments in these past two months of not knowing what or how to pray; not knowing the words to use; not always being sure of what to say or how to say it. More and more I hear people expressing similar thoughts and feelings; sharing their frustration and just wanting all this pandemic stuff to be over AND at the same time - often in the same breath they share a sense of fear and hesitancy, not knowing what tomorrow will bring.

How do you put such emotions into words? How do you express uncertainty, fear, and anxiety? How do you name thoughts and feelings we never thought we would encounter? How do you explain it to young children? The truth may be that there are moments that WE don't, the Spirit does. WHY? Because, as Paul has said over and over again, in our humanity we are finite and limited. As much as we want, we don't have all the answers. As much as we think, we are not in control. As much as we know, we still must walk by faith.

A friend sent me a picture the other day and I think it says perfectly what I have been trying to tell you today...when we bring to God our inarticulate sighs, desperate pleas, and exasperated groans; when we bring to God our jumbled thoughts and feelings in all their glorious messiness and ask the Spirit to "hear our prayer," this is God's reply: (show slide of jumbled letters and then Dear Child, I know. Love God.)

Perhaps it is then, in our jumbled moments, we are our most vulnerable and open self; vulnerable as individuals and as a community. It is then the Spirit reveals how emotionally involved and eternally invested it is in our yearnings and longings toward the Divine. It is then we come closer to God and God comes close to us in a way that cannot be explained. It is then the Spirit, that is always with us, steps in and finds the way for us. For we are, as Paul said, "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son" (8:29). Some translations use the word "predestined" here but it is not about our salvation being pre-determined, it is about God knowing from the beginning of creation that he wanted his followers to align their lives with Jesus.

We will be ok church. We will find our way through this pandemic, and we will be changed but NOT because of this virus, but because of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that will ensure our arrival on the other side. It is by the Spirit I hope and pray we will be a changed humanity: more aware, more kind, more responsible, more compassionate and empathetic, more pro-active, more in tune with what matters and how to be a part of the solution rather than the problem. I pray because we have hope as God's Easter people, as followers of Jesus, we have hope that all things work together for good for those who love God.

We may not know how or when. We may not feel like things are working for the good we want them to be. We may not see things coming together for good the way we imagined them to be. We may not be able to find one word out of 1, 057, 359.6 to express where we are emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, or one that captures the uncertainty, fatigue, and grief around us. Even then dear church, even then, we have hope. For we know when words are not enough the Spirit is. When words fail us, the Spirit will not. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever.

AMEN