

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
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Acts 2:14a, 36-41

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, . . . ³⁶Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” ³⁸Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

The Promise is for You

What is the message we must hear that will save our lives?

We live in a world of words clamoring for our attention. Pick me! Eat me! Buy me! We have a hard time sleeping without background noise and so the TV drowns out our dreams. We drive from here to there with the radio turned up singing words, words, and more words. And always we're listening to the words, hoping that one or more of them will cut to our hearts and send them pounding with a depth of spiritual clarity and human understanding, hoping that one or more of them will save our lives.

I just spent a week without words. – well, not exactly. But with Bill and the kids gone this past week, we'll just say that things were much quieter than usual. In my spirit, I heard the voice of God calling me everyday to receive the silence as a gift, but I kept filling it up with words. I hopped on the bike on Monday and immediately put music in my ear to keep me from hearing the sound of my own heart pounding. On Tuesday I drove into town with the music, (albeit MY music) turned way up. On Wednesday when the house got too quiet I began reading a novel full of words, words, and more words. On Thursday I went to another church to talk with the pastor about how I felt myself resisting the quiet I desperately needed. And so, finally on Friday morning I sat down and received the silence and the peace of Christ and it was beautiful. I hopped on my bike again that day, leaving the music in the house and wouldn't you know it I heard the glorious music of the birds. I continued reading my book, but I did so outside, where the sun was shining and the energy of life whirred and buzzed around me. And the unscripted silence saved my life this week, for therein I discovered myself as one of many beautiful and loved creations of God and it was a message I needed to hear. It was a message that saved my life this week.

In today's scripture reading, Peter speaks the words that will define Christianity for centuries to come. He speaks, “³⁶Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” These are not Peter's words, but the words of the Holy Spirit, for they are spoken on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God drops down upon the believers and they can't help but share what they believe is truth. Peter speaks to the house of Israel, to those who like Jesus were Jewish, and he proclaims that God made Jesus Lord and Messiah. He speaks from the context of his own life, sharing the messianic texts from the Hebrew scriptures with which he was raised, but his words were simple. **God has made Jesus Lord and Messiah – teacher and savior.** Do those words alone move you to belief? When they were first spoken, the hearers were “cut to the heart” and asked Peter what to do. And Peter told them to repent and be baptized. And they were.

But these words do not always cut us to the heart anymore. After all, these are the words we were taught as children, as youth, as young adults, and middle aged adults, as senior adults. They are all too familiar and as such have become rote. And so I repeat: what is the message *we* must hear that will save *our* lives? That will cut *us* to the heart? That will end our excuses and stop us from filling up our lives with words and sounds and consumer goods? **What is the message we are dying to hear that will save our lives?**

A woman tells of a deep depression after her mother has died. She moves through her days hollow and dark and she secretly stores up the leftover pain pills from her mother's house. Friends know she is not herself, but don't attempt to rescue her from her own grief . . . after all, what can they do? What can they say?. At 3 AM, not able to sleep, not able to handle the pain of life anymore, she counts out enough pills to guarantee she will never again wake up when someone knocks on her door. The woman she had only met briefly that afternoon recognized the signs of suicide and sought her out for a middle-of-the-night ride, stopping death in its tracks. The message this suicidal woman needed to hear did not contain words at all, but simply the caring presence of another human being. For after that, the pills were confiscated and the woman, little by little, was made whole.

What is the message that will save our lives?

The words they needed to hear in their spirits on the day of Pentecost were the very words put forth by Peter, by the Holy Spirit, "God has made Jesus Lord and Messiah! Teacher and savior!" "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"³⁹ *For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*"⁴⁰ *And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."*⁴¹ *So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.*

Of course there were those who did not believe, who were not cut to the heart, but three thousand persons were cut to the heart. For three thousand people, the message that their lives would never be the same again if they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, if they received the Holy Spirit who remained to comfort them and walk with them on life's journey – this message and in turn their belief saved their lives! And, Peter proclaimed, *the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.* This promise is for you. It's not the promise of heaven – some out-there promise, but rather the promise of peace right now, a reminder that the Spirit of God is still with you, still speaking to you, in words deeper than the drone of the TV. The Spirit of God speaks to you in a way that cuts to the heart and changes your very soul. It is a promise for you and for everyone the Lord our God calls to him.

What is the message we must hear that will save our lives?

"As a young man, Mahatma Gandhi studied in London. After learning about Christianity, and after reading the Sermon on the Mount, he decided that Christianity was the most complete religion in the world. It was only later, when he lived with a Christian family in East India, that he changed his mind. In that household he discovered that the word rarely became flesh -- that the teaching of Jesus rarely became the reality of Jesus."¹ If we have been cut to the heart, then we must silence our words and begin allowing the Word to live through us. We must put hurt feelings aside and forgive. We must acknowledge our needs and ask our brothers and sisters in Christ for help. We must essentially make ourselves vulnerable so that others can live. The message that Mahatma Gandhi needed to hear was not verbal but action. He needed only to see the word made flesh, but he didn't.

The message that our world needs to hear that will save so many lives is not always verbal. In a world that continues to scream, "Pick me! Eat me! Buy me!" we realize that what cuts to our heart is the Holy Spirit,

¹ From Susan R. Andrews sermon, "Holy Heartburn" in The Christian Century, April 7, 1999, p. 385.

living and acting and silencing the screams of the outside world. Sometimes our world needs to see, rather than hear, the message that will save its lives.

We come to the table of Christ today, wanting to be filled with the Holy Spirit who continues to live and dwell with us. The bread and wine are reminders that God has made Jesus Lord and Messiah, teacher and savior. So repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins, and be made whole. This promise is for you and for your children, and for your children's children, and for those who will come far into the future. Let us receive this message and may it cut to our hearts, may it save our lives. Amen.