

## *“What’s Jesus to do With Us?”*

Mark 1:21-28  
Rev. Jennifer Dunfee  
January 31, 2021

About a decade ago, two researchers from the University of Kansas asked parents of babies and toddlers to wear recording devices to study how many words they spoke a day to their little ones. They determined a goal for the number of words a baby or pre-school age child should hear each day was 30,000 – although an average was closer to 20,000. <https://www.education.com/magazine/article/30000-words/> To understand 30,000 by an equivalent measure, that would be reading *The Cat in the Hat* to your child 18 times each day. I am sure some of you can name the book that your child or grandchild loved that it sure felt like you read it 18 times a day.

Similar research has attempted to track how many words an average person hears in a day and have offered numbers from 20 to 50,000. (variety of internet searches) There are so many variables to this number: if you live alone or with others, are employed in a job that requires a lot of verbal communication, if you could quickly rattle off the names of your top five podcasts, keep the TV on all day tuned to a news station, say the words Siri or Alexa on the regular – while writing this I asked Alexa what her favorite word was and enjoyed her response – I will let those of you with an Alexa see for yourself and those without who are curious – just let me know – or if you are a teenager who hides an Airpod in your ear so that you can have a continual soundtrack of music. I also bet that the pandemic has changed *if not* the number of words you hear, then certainly the method. For example, very few of you have heard words from me in person in the last almost year, but you have heard a lot of words from me through a screen. Words are necessary for our development as humans, they are critical in keeping us connected to each other, and they can easily overwhelm us as we sort through the sea of them. Maybe even the barrage. I remember the first time I went to pump gas and the little video came on to talk to me and I didn’t like it and now I am just used to it.

The concept of the meaning of words in this sea or barrage feels charged, has become politicized – as fake news has entered our common vocabulary (although Stephen Colbert coined the term “truthiness” a full 15 years ago) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness> and it doesn’t surprise us anymore when someone says they don’t “believe” statistical data or rigorously reviewed science and as the Senate soon begins an impeachment trial on the article that the words of the previous President incited an insurrection. Words, and the accountability for their impact, is very much on our mind these days. Not just us, but the disciples and inhabitants of Jerusalem or

Capernaum, also lived in a world of words of competing authority and authenticity, words of regimes – where Pilate himself famously asks “what is truth?”

And Jesus enters into these worlds of words, our world of too many, or too many wasted, of lying, of words that offend, or words that pretend, of words that manipulate and hate, of words that cause violence, or words that disrupt silence, Jesus enters and he doesn't just cut a path through it, but makes all the rest fall away. Jesus is the Word, the Word of God, whose words spoke into being what is. The 7 in our scripture reading today along with the 10 in the scripture Pastor Scott preached about last week, join with the thousands of words recorded by Jesus that define power and authenticity.

Because here are some things about Jesus and his words. He never lies. He will never lie to you. He will never pretend to be one way only to be another. His words will not belittle you, or call you or a group you belong to unkind names. He does not make fun, although first Century Judaism scholars will tell us that he is funnier than we realize because we don't fully get the context for his humor. His words have nothing but your flourishing in mind, even when they are hard, they are speaking the truth in and with love, even when they aren't bringing you what you want because flourishing and what you want aren't necessarily the same thing. At least not for me. His words will not cause you to feel shame even when they are about the thing about which you yourself feel the most shame, often because someone else's words put that inside you. His words will not cause you to hate anyone, including yourself. They will not make you feel higher about yourself or a group you belong to than you feel about others or another's identity.

Those are the “nots and the nevers” of Jesus words: Here's what they will do: Be more powerful than any other spirit, force, demon, evil, sin, degradation, that exists in this world and be more powerful than any words from humans that have ever tried and failed to remove, cast out, fix, exorcise those very things. Cause four seemingly happy fishermen to upend their whole lives to hear more of them. Invite us into the kingdom of good news – news, as in good words. Leave crowds of people amazed, astounded by their authority, newness, power –so that if the gospel of Mark were a video, you could make a meme of all the times Jesus finishes speaking and the people who hear him turn to each other and say “what?” and “how is this?” with very amazed faces. Ones that can overpower with a “Be Silent” anything that is against Jesus that is taking up space within us, the unclean spirits of our very own. Call to come out from within us anything that does not further the love of God in the drama of our one human heart, and the love of God moving from within us through us to our families, neighborhoods, country and world. Cut through all the noise that tells us who we are as not enough of something, and instead tell us that we are claimed, called and sent. And then all of these verb words: forgive, free, heal, love, reconcile, redeem, the words/verbs of life.

I love the moment in this scripture When the voice inside the man knows it has been beat before Jesus even turns those seven words in his direction. Because whatever story that unclean spirit was peddling had so many holes, maybe ones you couldn't see in the darkness, but once the light was shining upon it, even just near it, you could see that it was holding him in by threads. It reminds me of what St. Augustine said about evil – that it isn't to be answered, it is overcome. (“How Augustine Responded to the Problem of Evil Without Solving It” by James K.A. Smith, *Christian Century* 10.9.19) Jesus doesn't engage in debate when provoked by this spirit, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” He gets asked two questions he doesn't dignify with the response of his words. There is no debate between Jesus and the powers that work against God – just enough with you, you are done here. Overcome.

David Heim wrote an article on “The Gospel in 7 words” where writers and theologians were asked to sum up the essence of gospel. No one offered Jesus' 7, “Be Silent, and come out of him” from this scripture. (“The Gospel in Seven Words” by David Heim *Christian Century* 8.23.12) Pastor Scott will appreciate that Walter Bruegemann sent a 6-word entry and said he rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> word. Mary Carr wrote “we are the church in infinite chances” Martin Marty – God, through Jesus, welcomes you anyhow” and Beverly Roberts Gaventa suggested, “In Christ God's yes defeats our no.” But I think Nadia Bolz-Weber's comes closest to the word from the Word in today's scripture “We are who God says we are.” Any other words about you, other than the ones that come from the Word, see the light through the holes, and let him call them out. For he has the power to do so. Thanks be to God.