

Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
September 22, 2013

1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; John 1:1-14  
“Words”

This is the fourth and final sermon in the series of how God was present to me during my vacation in Europe. I trust you you have seen by now that although each of these sermons speaks about my overseas trip they have come in sermons as good news for all of us.

This sermon is about words. There were many wonderful words shared in and on churches, museums, posters, brochures, signs and by family and friends along the way. A few stuck as excellent means of communicating the gospel. Two came directly from the Corinthian passages read earlier in the service.

The words embody Jesus in the world as read in the Gospel according to John.

As we saw in the litany of reconciliation earlier in this service there were amazing words at Coventry Cathedral in England. We recall how the cathedral was bombed by the Germans in World War II but before we think of blaming the Germans we also remember how England and the USA bombed Germany during the war. It was a gruesome tit-for-tat.

We visited a church in Dresden, Germany, that was rebuilt after the war and the only items remaining from the devastating bombing of the city were a sanctuary frontice piece and two angels which gloriously adorn the rebuilt church. Suellen and I paused in silence in both Dresden and Coventry and prayed for world peace.

It is note-worthy that the City of Dresden gave to Coventry a sculptor of people praying for peace. The sculptor sits among the famous ruins of Coventry Cathedral. A magnificent sculptor of two people kneeling and embracing in the same vicinity was given to Coventry by the Japanese.

Next to the church ruins a beautiful church has been built with a stunning, huge clear-glass window, bordered by human figures etched into the glass, looking onto the ruins. The cornerstone of the church has this inscription:

To the glory of GOD  
this Foundation Stone was laid by  
Queen Elizabeth the Second  
on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March 1956  
Other foundation can no man lay  
than that which is laid

which is JESUS CHRIST +

A more modern translation of the latter statement comes from our first reading today: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."

The statement on the cornerstone places the proper emphasis on who it is that actually lays the foundation of the church. From an earthly point-of-view it was the queen but from a spiritual point-of-view it is Jesus Christ and as it applies to Coventry Cathedral it applies to Redwoods Presbyterian Church.

The foundation of our faith is none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord, whom we worship and serve.

This affirmation offers a perfect segue into the next set of words contained in another story. It pertains to one of the few Protestant churches in strongly Catholic Belgium.

The church is hidden in the tiny town of Maria-Horebeke which we visited with our Belgium family. The basic story is that Belgium was under Spanish control during the Reformation and they actively suppressed non-Catholics. A group of Protestants was able to remain active in the seclusion of the woods in the region Horebeke. After the fall of Napoleon in 1815 they were allowed to practice openly and build churches. This church was built in 1872 and is now part of "The United Protestant Church of Belgium."

There was a time when the struggle between Catholics and Protestants was quite gruesome and we are ashamed to say so but we repent of our history and move on to greater caring and compassion. Hopefully, that aspect of our history is over.

The church these Protestants built still stands and is active. It's a fine-looking, stone church the size of Redwoods and sits in what is regarded as one of the most beautiful regions of Belgium. We had a lovely luncheon on the patio at a nearby restaurant.

On top of the wooden door of the church is a concrete sculptor of an open Bible on which are engraved the words: "Wy prediken niet ons zelven/Maar Christus Jesus onzen verlosser." We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, a quote from our second biblical reading today. That in itself is a clarion call of Christians and especially the Reformed branch of the Reformation of which we are.

Suellen and I had dinner with a very dear friend here in the Bay Area. She is of the "spiritual but not religious" kind, in other words, she appreciates spirituality in its broadest context. She doesn't claim Christianity as her belief system but

has worshipped in a Christian church as much as she has dipped and delved into other religions and spiritualities.

The dinner was at her home and she invited her brother of the same ilk to the dinner. Surrounded by Buddha statues and other lovely items we conversed about everything under the sun and later in the evening the conversation turned to religion. It was back-and-forth and enjoyable and at one point I took off like a rocket and what I said struck a chord. The guest strongly affirmed me and what I said and we continued the conversation.

Our friend asked if I really heard what her brother had said. I felt what it was like for a guru when people set them up to be religious leaders. Praise came my way as if I was Christ which made me feel uncomfortable for I knew that whatever I said was not me but Christ within me. "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord."

It's really good to be pulled up by this kind of text which places all the glory, all the praise on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The application from both messages is praise of the One who is the foundation of the church and therefore our lives, and Jesus as our Lord, the ultimate authority in our lives; an authority which encourages love, compassion, peace and justice.

So we thank God for the words of our journeys and the words of scripture and especially the Word who became flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth.

An addendum: One cannot complete a trip to England (at least for me) without going to an authentic tea shop for a cup of tea and scone with butter, jam and fresh cream. Suellen and I went to the best tea shop, Bari Tea, in Alnwick, Northumberland. Above our table was a sign which read: "A Proper Tea is much nicer than a Very Nearly Tea, which is one you forget about afterwards." What is a "Proper Tea," you may ask? From one who grew up on the best Ceylon teas, I'd say that the short version is: It tastes like heaven. I hope our worship services are "Proper" as opposed to "Very Nearly" and I hope our lives in Christ are "Proper" as opposed to "Very Nearly." Amen.