

Bold Speech – Impossible Words!

E-3B

Acts 3:12-19; Luke 24:36b-48

Acts 3:12 When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites,¹ why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant¹ Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus¹ has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. ¹⁷ "And now, friends,¹ I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah¹ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

- When the lame beggar was healed, crowds gathered, and Peter began to preach! His sermon outline is simple to follow:
 - Jesus was one of them. He was sent by the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - Jesus was no stranger to them. He was the one who was rejected and handed over to Pilate to be killed.
 - Jesus' history did not end in the grave; he has been raised from death.
 - Faith in Jesus' name has restored this beggar's health.
 - Do not let guilt keep you from approaching God; what was done to Christ was done in ignorance.
 - Repent and turn to God, who will wipe away your sins.

^{NRS} **Luke 24:36** While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."¹ ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still

wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you -- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah¹ is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,¹ beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

- ...takes place after Jesus encountered the disciples on the Road to Emmaus (verses 13-35). The two Emmaus disciples ran to Jerusalem to inform the Eleven that Jesus was alive. While they were in conversation about Jesus' appearance to the Emmaus disciples, Jesus himself appeared to all of them and spoke.
 - *Peace be with you* (verse 36b). These are echoes of words he had spoken to the disciples days before in John 14 and 16.
 - *Why are you frightened* (verse 38), and why do you doubt? These words echo those spoken to Joseph in Matthew 1, to both Mary and Zacharias in Luke 1, and to the shepherds in Luke 2.
- Luke's report supports the bodily resurrection of Christ.
 - His hands and feet bore evidence of having been crucified.
 - He could be touched; he was not a ghost or an apparition.
 - He ate with them.
- Finally, the passage concludes with Luke's version of the Great Commission, which actually extends into verse 49. For additional accounts of this Great Commission, see Acts 1:6-8, or Matthew 28:16-20.

It is now days later, time has passed since the Resurrection of Jesus; and the wonder mixed with many questions lingers. Note the words in Luke's account, which seem almost exactly as the description on that very first day.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."^{1 37} They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (Luke 24)

The eleven disciples were gathered in Jerusalem. And, their reactions revealed their hesitancy and inaction. They were still trying to make sense of these **IMPOSSIBLE WORDS**. His appearance made them wonder. Seeing his hands and hearing again those powerful words, "*Peace be with you,*" Luke describes their reaction, "⁴¹ *While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering...*" So, Jesus does the only thing any good Methodist would do. He asks them for something to eat! Sounds a bit weird; but that is the point. Is he real or a ghost, an apparition, or a figment of their collective imagination? There were many who could only make sense of this supposed Christ resurrection by

rationalizing that Jesus never as the divine Christ suffered or died. He somehow miraculously escaped just before the execution on the cross. He might have ducked out and into the body of Simon of Cyrene who was recruited to carry the cross for Jesus on that last leg of the walk to Golgotha. But, by eating he demonstrated that he was not a ghost and that he had a resurrected body.

His assurance to them with the word of “*peace be with you*” echo the words in John 14 and 16 to the disciples just before the arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. “*My peace I give you, not as the world gives, do I give to you...*” and “*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*” (John 16:33) He means, of course, that he has by God’s grace and will, conquered the power of evil and death so that nothing will be able to separate a disciple from the love of God in Christ Jesus as our Lord. Paul picks up on this in Romans 8.

These are sometimes very difficult words to hear and to take in and process, when grief and disillusionment is front and center

in our emotional state of mind. But, it is not the final word, as difficult and perhaps seemingly impossible to hear and to believe. This threat of death and separation is not the final word. God's word is reaching into our darkness with the light of life and hope.

The amazing thing is that this new reality was so close at hand that it did not take too much to break through to this new state of being. After eating, he went back over the words of Moses again and he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. They began to realize that the Messiah must suffer and die; but also they must be willing to take these great risks as a servant of God also. The words that Jesus spoke, according to Luke, were just like the words of the *Great Commission* in Matthew. (cf. Matthew 28:16-20)

Now, here comes the **challenge**. **It is this**: we must share this holy Christ and his **word of life** with the world. It is not a believer's self possession given and experienced for our private enjoyment and peace of mind. Jesus came to bring life. Because he

brings life, we have hope. Nothing is more powerful today or tomorrow than HOPE.

Giving “hope” in the midst of impossible words is the gift of grace that comes in our bold speech and actions. We can be nothing less, as Peter and all the others were in those uncertain days, than bold and daring and creative speakers of these IMPOSSIBLE words. When we are so filled with holy boldness, the world cannot stop the life that Christ means to bring through us. Do you believe that God may work this power of grace to transform us and the world into the kingdom of love, justice and mercy of God’s kingdom?

What do we know today that cries out for a word of hope? Is this world today not also filled with uncertainty and anxiety? Every age is a new chapter in how brutal humanity can become toward each other. A large company that had been trusted and respected turns into a pile of rubbish with ruinous impact of thousands and thousands of lives. That story is replayed in every country, even in our own denomination. While we look at banks and financial

institutions going belly up and bankrupting 402 k plans and dreams, Enron and World Com had already begun to send signals of corporate malpractice and greed. Now, in top ten of the Fortune 500 we have Exxon, Chevron, and Valero who are companies that have made billions and rose higher in the ranks when all the rest were slipping and sliding off the charts. Yet, while the companies scream one thing, another reality takes focus. We have more oil on reserve now than ever before. We are saving money more and not spending as frivolously and we are told that we should go back to the old ways of spending in order to save our economic soul.

Values are turned topsy turvy, upside down. Somewhere in the midst of these confusing and conflicting messages, we need to find the compass that points us in a true direction where life is determined less by possession and more by compassion toward one another in this human world.

We also must find life and hope when war and death and threats of ongoing, never ending massive conflicts continue.

Whether it be in Bagdad or Karachi or Mumbai or North Korea,

we have to find a way to make that human connection that is our God link to creation. We have to find the path to peace that affirms life. We have to find ways to build bridges of trust rather than perpetuating structures of hate and revenge. When will the lion and the lamb lie down side by side to demonstrate this hope?

I am as dismayed as anyone when we revisit traumatic and violent deaths from Columbine to the Twin Towers. I am as distraught at random shootings with gangs among the innocents as I am about a mom and dad brutal murder suicide. I am as disgusted as you are about the manipulation of the markets that leave out the common guy and destroys the fabric of human homes and dreams.

But, it is our task to live out and to share a new reality that Jesus opened up to us. We can turn in a new direction. Our minds can open up to what God wants over our wants and insecurities. Our hearts can open wider to care for our brothers and sisters. And our doors can become unlocked from the prejudice of dress, class, cultural barriers to the loving inviting welcoming space of this holy sanctuary. It is not our place. It is our calling to offer this space in

our mind and hearts to those who are most in need. There is a prayer that goes, “Lord Jesus, forgive us our sins, especially those in most need of grace now.”

Deborah Western gave a wonderfully self reflective sermon to the youth at their worship last Sunday. She found herself delving deeper into what it meant to have an open mind in her soul and in our church. We will be soon hitting the airways again with the ASK campaign on channel 6. Any response that these bold words that we dare to speak to the community must be met with the vision of what are IMPOSSIBLE words of God in Christ that are experienced as real and genuine among us. We dare to be what God wants us to be. Can we handle that? Can we trust these IMPOSSIBLE WORDS of God to work in and through us? More than likely we will stutter, choke, twist, and squirm until we find that our disbelieving is no different that those long ago who wanted to see for themselves the wounds in the hands, feet and side to prove that God’s word is true. We may also struggle with the joy of Easter while still disbelieving and wondering. God will

not cast us out for these questions or struggles. God accepts our questions and our stumbling as we move along this journey of Easter. Do not be afraid. Do not be frightened. God is love and God is with you and me. God's word will endure and will bring a future filled with hope, not dread, not fear, but assurance that one day death will be no more, tears will cease and we will know with full certainty that the end is as it was meant to be in the beginning because God is the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I invite you to believe in Jesus who is our sign of this eternal hope. Amen.