

Devotions – April 10-16, 2016

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Sunday, April 10, 2016

Big Church Word #1 - Forgiveness

You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

We Christians use words that mean something slightly different in the church than the rest of the world. This week's devotions are about those "big churchy words" whose meanings have a certain added richness from the scriptures and traditions that surround them.

True Story: About every three weeks, a man in a semi-rural area of Minnesota had to replace his mailbox after some delinquent youths hit it with their car. Every few weeks he could hear them coming as their engine revved, and one by one his neighbor's mailboxes would fall. Then CRASH! His would go down, too. After losing three or four mailboxes, it was time to act. He went to a junkyard and purchased a 30-foot solid steel railroad beam. He shoved all but four feet of it into the ground and placed his mailbox on top. (I imagine by now you can see where this is going.)

A few nights later he listened as the engine revved and one after another his neighbors' mailboxes fell. Then CRAAAAAAAAAASH! He walked out in his robe to find a car propped up on a buried railroad beam. The guts from the front of the car were folded underneath the back, and around it were three very surprised but unharmed teenagers. When the sheriff asked about filing charges, the old man said, "I think they've learned their lesson."

We do not need to be too creative in thinking up punishments for sinners. Burnout is a natural symptom of failing to keep the Sabbath. Things will not go well in God's land for those who fail to honor their mothers and fathers. Coveting your neighbor's lifestyle and possessions rather than a right relationship with your neighbor himself will probably keep you from having either. Sinners suffer by their own doing. God's forgiveness is mercy to the guilty. Sometimes that means ending the suffering that the guilty bring upon themselves. It is God's proclamation that, for God's part, what is deserved has happened to Jesus instead of you.

"Has no one condemned you...neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again." (John 8:10-11)

Let us pray in the words often used in worship:

Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us so that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.



Monday, April 11, 2016

Big Church Word #2 – Rejoice

You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

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Today's word is "Rejoice." Most of the time, rejoice means to feel joyful. You might rejoice when a new child is born, when you get a new job, or if you win an election. You might rejoice when you finally pay off your debts or get married. These are all times when a person would expect to feel joyful.

There is no harm in joy that feels good, but God's grace active in our lives has never been limited only to those times we are able to feel it. Rather than telling us to rejoice only when we feel like it, the Bible gives us ways to rejoice no matter how we feel.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9)

Rejoicing, like worshipping, can happen in a variety of ways. Rejoicing happens when we meditate on the goodness of God, when we are gentle and kind to others, when we bring our sad troubles to the Lord in prayer, and when we experience God in ways we do not understand.

So today, pray following the words of Philippians 4.

Pray about the things that make you anxious.

Give thanks.

Pray for peace.

Pray for what is true, noble, right, and pure.

Pray that you can put God's grace into practice.

Amen



Tuesday, April 12, 2016

Big Church Word #3 - New

You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

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"Forgive us, **renew** us, and lead us."

-Confession of Sins, Red Hymnal p. 95

"Uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in **newness** of life."

-Confession of Sins, Red Hymnal p. 95

"Behold, I make all things **new**."

-Revelation 21:5

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a **new** creation."

-2 Corinthians 5:17

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a **new** and right spirit within me."

-Psalm 51:10

"O sing to the Lord a **new** song."

-Psalm 96:1

I purchased a custom Red Wings jersey for my girlfriend a couple years ago. (It worked. She married me.) It was brand new. It had never been worn. It was even a little shiny. It was custom made with her name on the back and the number 41 because she works at the 41 Steakhouse. That brand new custom jersey cost me about \$250. A good friend also has a Red Wings jersey. It is a little beat up. It has scuff marks and stains, possibly even some blood on it. This jersey has the number 5 and the name "Lidstrom." It is worth thousands of dollars. Why is my brand new jersey worth less than this old thing? Because the old thing was actually played in by Nicklas Lidstrom, who played 20 seasons with the Detroit Red Wings. He is considered the best NHL defenseman of all time. The old jersey is worth more because it is connected to a real person and a great name.

New normally means young or fresh, but to the Christian, “new” is about being connected to a person and a name: Jesus Christ. You can see from the verses above that God is all about newness. God is about affecting our lives completely. When we pray for God to change or help us, we can expect that God will move heaven and earth to do it. We can expect God’s voice to speak with full authority. We can expect Christ to forgive our thoughts, words, deeds, body, soul, past, present, future, relationships, decisions, commissions, omissions, and everything else. So when you pray for new life, pray boldly and expect complete newness in the person, the name of Jesus.

Lord Jesus Christ, you make all things new. Make me new as well. Amen



Wednesday, April 13, 2016

Big Church Word #4 – Word

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-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

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Bel Canto, the women’s choir at Concordia College, once included the song “Adiemus” in their concert. It was truly beautiful. Dr. Nesheim, the choir director, then turned around and asked the audience to guess what language they just heard. Here are the words, perhaps you can guess.

A-ri-a-di-a-mus-la-te, a-ri-a-di-a-mus-da,
A-ri-a- na-tus-la-te-a-du-a
A-re-va-re-tu-e-va-te, a-re-va-re-tu-e-va-te,
A-re-va-re-tu-e-va-te-la-ti-a
A-ne-ma-ne-coo-le-ra-we, a-ne-ma-ne-coo-le-ra,
A-ne-ma-ne-coo-le-ra-we-a-ka-la
A-ne-ma-ne-coo-le-a-we-a-ka-la a-ya-do-wa-ye-
A-ya-do-wa-ye A-ya-do-wa-ye-e

The audience guessed Latin, Greek, or maybe an African language. We were all wrong. Dr. Nesheim told us that the song is gibberish. The composer simply invented syllables that sounded good with the music. The song sounds absolutely beautiful, but means absolutely nothing. Words are powerful things, but what makes them powerful? I suppose it helps if they are actually words, but beyond that, the Bible has a lot to say about what makes a word powerful.

First, words are living and not just written or spoken. When Jesus preached at Nazareth, he read from the book of Isaiah and proclaimed, “This scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” In other words, “I AM this scripture come true.” Words are meant to have the backing of a person’s true presence and action. Jesus did not just promise that his words would endure, but that *he would be with us* until the end.

Second, words are to be infused with God’s love. Without love, words can be meaningless or even damaging. *1 Corinthians* says, “*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*”

Gracious God, you have given us the spoken word, the written word, and the living word in Jesus Christ. Write your word on our hearts so that we may reflect it in the world with our speech and action. Amen.



Thursday, April 14, 2016

Big Church Word #5 – Member

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-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

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Our church constitutions must identify a member in some way. Most of them say something like “a baptized person who attends at least once per year and gives one contribution of record per year.” As you might imagine, this does not do justice to God’s view of a member. Baptism and faith make us members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Participation of a certain level will maintain your administrative membership in a congregation. But, membership in the kingdom is not about minimal participation on Sunday morning.

As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”* ²² *On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* ²³ *and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;* ²⁴ *whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,* ²⁵ *that there may*

be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:20-26)

If you are part of the church, then Christ does not view you as a member of an organization. Christ regards you as part of his very self. Your hands are his, and they serve and heal in his name. Your face is his face, and it reflects love and compassion in his name. Your feet, despite any calluses and poorly maintained toenails, are the beautiful feet that carry the good news. Your mouth is to speak the truth of Christ. So when you are lost, you are missed. When you suffer, it is Christ who suffers with you. When you sin, it reflects on us all. Membership is to be part of a body, not a club.

Almighty God, by the love of Jesus Christ you draw people to yourself and welcome them into the household of faith. May we show your joy by embracing each other as we bear your creative and redeeming word to all the world. Keep us close together in your Spirit, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, and in service to others, following the example of Jesus Christ, our servant and Lord. Amen. (ELW Additional Prayer for The Church, p. 75, slightly adjusted)



Friday, April 15, 2016

Big Church Word #6 – Family

*You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.
-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride*

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Over the years, "Family" has come to mean different things to different people. The meanings of family have become so varied that people often speak of their family as their "biological" or "nuclear" family. I have friends who are "brothers" and "sisters." My church is full of "brothers and sisters in Christ."

When the disciples informed Jesus that his family was waiting for him, Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother." This may seem to be a dismissal of Mary. Any mother would read this and wonder what is wrong with Jesus. (Matthew 12:50)

But at the foot of the cross, Jesus made sure that Mary was cared for by a disciple whom he loved. He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother," and to Mary, "Woman, behold your son."

(John 19:26-27). So we see that Jesus never dismissed Mary as family. Rather, he expanded Mary's family and fulfilled his own command to care for the widow. We find that family is something that is founded in Christ just as truly as it is found in marriage and childbearing. The care, forgiveness, and unconditional love one would find in family is also to be found in the church.

Look around your church and community. Christian, behold your family.

From a prayer for families written by Pope Pius XII:

*Under your paternal gaze, O Lord,
and with confidence in your Providence
and in the loving care of Jesus Christ
the family will become a sanctuary of virtue
and a school of wisdom.
It shall prove, as Christ has promised,
a haven of rest against life's burdens.
In the sight of the world it shall render glory to you, O Father,
and to your Son, Jesus, until the day when,
through Him, we shall, together with all His members,
sing the Divine praises in the eternal ages to come.
Amen*



Saturday, April 16, 2016

Big Church Word #7 - Elect

You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

-Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride

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By the time this devotional is published, many, if not all, states will have completed their presidential primary elections. We "elect" the person we think is most qualified to fill an office and carry out certain responsibilities. So why does the church often use the word "elect" to describe people who believe and are saved? It is a good question.

On one hand, election to public office is similar to election to God's kingdom. A person elected to public office does not assume that office by his or her own will. Someone else must decide

that such a person may hold that office. In our case, the American People decide who is President. Many people vote for one. Likewise, a person elected to be in God's kingdom cannot enter by his or her own will or power. Someone else must elect such a person to inhabit the kingdom. The One on the throne elects the many who will enter.

On the other hand, it is quite different because qualifications are not a consideration for God's kingdom. In fact, election to God's kingdom is the salvation of those (we) who are in all ways unqualified to be there. Sinners who are washed in the blood of Christ and the waters of baptism, find themselves worthy to enter by God's grace alone.

So I offer two prayers this week.

For our earthly governments:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, bless the public servants in all areas of government, that they may do their work in a spirit of wisdom, charity, and justice. Help them use their authority to serve faithfully and to promote our common life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (ELW p. 77)

And for the day we stand at the throne of God:

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen!

