

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, May 27, 2020! Thank you so much for joining in today and taking this time to focus on God and our relationship with Christ.

As I mentioned last week, I will continue with a theme of the Word for this week, but specifically, I would love to talk about the Living Word. The Living Word comes to us in two different ways, it has two meanings which spiritually give us life. The first is that Jesus is the Living Word. The second is that the Living Word breathes new life into us through the Scriptures.

So as we begin our dive into the Living Word, please join me in a word of prayer:

*God of all life and creation, we come to you today with spirits of hope. We pray in hope for our world, our people, our current pandemic situation, and all the ways we grieve and find joy in this wild and unprecedented time. You give us an everlasting sense of hope, dear Lord, in your Son Jesus, whose death and resurrection give us powerful hope in the new life he brings. Help us to center ourselves on your Son Jesus, the Word made flesh, and the power and peace that comes from his presence and new life. Inspire us through your Word, made new to us in every time and place, the life sustaining joy found in you. In your Son Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Last week we focused on the Word through poetry, so beautiful and powerful, and a central part of the Old Testament, and in honor of my late pastor, Brent Christianson. Today, we are going to focus on the Word as the Living Word, which brings us firmly into the New Testament. Which also means we get to spend lots of time talking and thinking about Jesus today, praise the Lord! Always a good time when we get to focus on Jesus.

I will begin this time on the Living Word by reading from the Word, the scripture that I think best encompasses the Living Word, so this is John 1:1-5, 14, 16-18.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[d] full of grace and truth.*

*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,[e] who is close to the Father's heart,[f] who has made him known.*

The Word of the Lord.

So as I mentioned previously, there are two main ways that we can think about what the Living Word is. The first is Jesus. The second is the life we gain through the Scriptures.

Let's start with Jesus. Jesus is probably the best place to start in many situations, but especially this one.

The scripture I read today is also known as the prologue to the gospel of John. And this beginning to the gospel of John is very different from the beginning of the other three gospels, the other three accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Matthew and Luke focus on what happened before Jesus' birth, and Mark immediately jumps in with Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. The word "immediately" is used a lot in the gospel of Mark.

But John takes the time to flesh out Jesus as the divine Son, made flesh and living among humans, by the power of God. These beginning words of the Word, that the Word was in the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God, firmly place Jesus as part of God, that the human Son who lived and dwelt among us and gave us all new life, is truly God at work in our world. God in this life work has been with us from the very beginning, and is with us now. What came into being with God and Jesus was life, and that life is the light that shines forth for all people. Light is necessary for life - certainly the green plants around us are a testament to that, and our need for sunshine cannot be ignored either. Gotta get that Vitamin D!

But as consistently as we see the sun rise and shine every day, so Jesus is the light that shines for all people. This light is reliable, it allows life to bloom and grow, it nourishes our bodies and spirits and gives us hope. It is because Jesus was alive as a human that he is the Living Word. And his life, including his death and new life rising from the grave, is that light that empowers all people, that gives us all life in the Word.

The part that connects both Jesus and the Scriptures to be the Living Word is the word that means Word used in John's gospel. Wow, saying "Word" a lot today! But the word that means Word in Greek is logos, which has deep roots in both Greek and Jewish tradition. In Greek, this word means an orderly plan, the order and plan of the universe. And in the Jewish tradition, the Hebrew version of this word, it means divine Wisdom. So logos, the Word that is with God and is God, is both the orderly plan and divine Wisdom of our universe. It encompasses all things, and a deep sense of knowing that comes not only from our heads, but from within our spirits too. This deep sense of knowing and relying on God providing the divine Wisdom for our universe, can also certainly be called faith and hope, true nourishment for our spirits.

The Living Word in the scriptures helps us to think and feel what it is to be truly alive, to have life. All the aspects of being alive, our bodies, our hearts, our minds, our spirits. As we talked about last week, the poetry in the bible allows the art of words to shine forth, and no human experience is left untouched by what we find in the scriptures. This deep knowing of what it is to be human brings us great comfort and empowers us to know that truly, with God all things are possible. But I'm thinking too about the uniqueness of the human experience we have now. What it is to live in a human body, to be made flesh by God in this day and age, to breathe life in and out every single day, what our hearts and spirits incite and inspire and initiate within us. What happens in your body when you encounter the scriptures? What happens in your body

when you pray to God? How does your mindset change when the Word is at the forefront of your mind?

For me, when I read scripture and dwell in the Word, the physical phenomenon is two things, often simultaneously. I feel a deepness, a connection in my heart, and I notice a calming of my head and breathing. Seriously. It's why I always take a deep breath before I pray, to prepare myself to be centered on that experience. It should be such a natural thing, to breathe deeply and focus your mind on prayer, and on the Word of God, but it is very countercultural, to actually take that moment away from the hustle of everything. To put a pause on the frenetic nature of all the directions we are pulled in, and use mental and spiritual energy to be filled by the creative power of the Living Word. Taking time to actually read words slowly and let them wash over you is healing. It's empowering. It brings us peace, the peace which surpasses all understanding.

And this power and peace are what bring us back to our created selves, our truest spirits created, called, and deeply loved by God.

This Word is called Living because it changes us. Though they may appear as Words on a page, the Word, Christ Jesus, is revealed in their power. We feel a physical, mental, spiritual difference when we read them, and the words appear new to us every time we encounter them. There is always something new and life-giving to be found in the scriptures. What we find in the Word is not necessarily what someone next to us will find, which is different from what our ancestors found in the scripture, and what future generations will find either. But that's the power of the Word, it is made new to all of us in an infinite way. There is newness to be found in the power of God's Word. And that newness is powerful. It has the power to bring our minds out of our valleys and pits and into the light and new life. The Word is always there for us, for all generations. And this newness, this life, this light and hope, is what truly makes it the Living Word.

The spiritual practice I would love for you all to try out this week is indeed centered on the Word. I would love for you all to try Dwelling in the Word, lectio divina, this week on this text from John 1. Read through the scripture slowly, take your time to really dwell in the words and let them speak to you. Notice what is going on in your body as you read this scripture, two or three times over. How does your heart feel? How is your breathing? And think too - what excites you? What questions do you have? What sparks curiosity for you? Write down what made you think, what stuck with you in this scripture, and I invite you to pray with that word or phrase in mind. And taking note of how prayer feels in our body makes it that much more real for us - it's tangible, a physical reminder of the power, peace, and presence of God. Oftentimes the things we need most are revealed in Scripture, in this way of really considering the Word, and those deep needs and desires are what lead us to God and living out our calling in God's created world.

One last note I want to make before we end our time together today is about our virtual small group ministry at Mt. Zion. If you are interested in doing activities like dwelling in the Word and

praying with others, or just connecting with folks from Mt. Zion in a time of fellowship, please fill out our survey about small groups. I will post a link to the survey in the comments on this video, or feel free to find it in the email sent last week, and this week's Weekly Word email, which will come out later today. We would absolutely love to connect in this new and exciting ministry, and are so grateful for all the ways you are living into being the church in new ways.

So now, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, let's end our time together by joining in the powerful words Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.*

Thank you so much for joining us today! Have a beautiful day. Amen.