

Seventh Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "Cupid, Tupperware and Us"
Isaiah 55:10-13, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
July 15-16, 2023
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Does anyone know the nickname of this little dip in the middle of our upper lip? It's called a "Cupid's bow," 'cause it has the outline of the archer's bow from which the god Cupid shoots his love darts ☺ in Roman mythology and classic art. There's a lovely, creative explanation of how our Cupid's bow got there. As the story goes, God sends every baby to earth in the arms of an angel. On the way down the angel counsels the baby not to reveal what the baby has seen in Heaven. To bring the point home, the angel presses her finger against the baby's lips, making a lasting impression: a Cupid's bow!

I think we'd agree babies **are** Heaven-sent, though not exactly as the story describes. The theological truth is that each one of us comes **from** God and will be returning **to** God someday. The first lesson says something similar about God's Word: it comes **from** God and will be returning **to** God, but not before it has watered the earth and made living things grow, in the language of Isaiah. **God's Word will be fruitful.** It's never old news, like yesterday's newspaper.

*... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*
(Isaiah 55:11, NRSV)

God's Word has a holy job to do. What **is** that divine work? What is God's purpose in giving the gift of the Word?

God's Word describes Who **God** is and who **we** are called to be. It is given to help us understand God's enormous love for us, shown in the gift of life itself and in the gift of

everlasting Life through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the living Word of God. God's written Word and God's preached Word are tasked with transforming us more and more into the image of Christ; the job of God's Word is make our lives fruitful in faith, hope and love. Along with the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, the Word of God is a "means of grace": a channel by which God's love flows into our lives, a cascade of divine love: not a reward we could **ever** earn but pure gift.

This lesson from Isaiah 55 about the fruitfulness, power, invincibility and precious nature of God's Word is **so important** that it's one of the options for the core stories of salvation read at the Easter Vigil each year. It's right up there with the beautiful and irreplaceable stories of the Creation of all things and the Exodus from Egypt, not to mention Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

Speaking of that fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel, this past Easter Vigil was the very first time that Linda Murphy did **not** read that passage here at Holy Trinity. We had other wonderful lectors lined up to do the other readings, and pretty much their sole request was that they **not** have to read **that** lesson. Linda's a tough act to follow, after all. So I took one for the team and **I** signed up to read it -- but the contemporary version from *The Message*, so fewer comparisons could be made ☺.

Glad news: Linda will be up from Florida and in town, preaching here at Holy Trinity the first weekend in August! I've been in touch with her to set the date, so I smiled when a Lenten e-devotion that Linda wrote in 2003 surfaced this last week as I did sermon prep. She reflected on a couple verses from this weekend's lesson from Isaiah, including:

*... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty....*

Linda wrote:

My family has a long-standing tradition of sending food home in containers following every family gathering. Back in the days before baggies, that involved making off with someone's favorite Tupperware container, in exchange for an oath to return it. Sometimes it might even involve a verbal contract posting the first-born child as collateral. (As the first-born, I observed this ritual with great personal interest!)

However, there was also an unspoken contract, which included never returning the container empty. At the heart of it, it seemed to me at the time, was getting the all-important Tupperware back to its rightful owner, and the sooner it was refilled with cookies or soup for Nana, the better the chances that the container would not get buried and forgotten in the Tupperware closet. As an adult, having earned my own doggie bag rights, I began to understand the "Tupperware Challenge" as one of the simple ways we expressed our love and gratitude for one another in our family.

Each week we are fed and nourished with the word of God. It is read and sung, interpreted in a sermon, and even printed on paper to take home as "food for the week" – all too often tossed away, buried or forgotten. This week, imagine taking it home in a Tupperware container, whose lid is imprinted with these words: "it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah reminds us that each tiny raindrop or snowflake shares its purpose with the world before it returns to God. On our... journey, may we listen a little closer for the great purpose He has in mind for each of us.

I reached out to Linda for permission to quote her, and she texted back a green light as well as her gladness that the message "is still fresh after 20+ years. But, of course it is. It's been saved in a Tupperware container!"

Like God's mercies, God's Word is fresh every morning. Like any classic literature, there are always more gems to be mined every time we return to it. That's not to say that **every** word strikes our heart like Cupid's arrow **every** time we read or hear it. But it **is** to say there is always nourishment for us in the Word, if we are open and receptive. *Christ in Our Home* is a wonderful little resource. In the first half of the week it refers back to Scripture we just heard in worship, and in the second half of the week it looks toward what

we'll hear the upcoming weekend. The authors of the tiny one-page devotions are reflecting on how the Word of God connects to our real, everyday lives, challenges, struggles, joys, sorrows, hopes and questions. If you don't know where to begin with Bible reading, think about beginning here! We provide free copies to all who want them. If you have time and desire, go a step further and devote your summer Wed. evenings to Peter Seggel's Bible study on the "I Am" sayings in the Fourth Gospel: "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the vine, you are the branches," "I am the way, the truth and the life." Or buy yourself a devotional Bible that helps you pray with Scripture, or a study Bible that helps you better understand what you're reading. Do whatever it takes for you to expose yourself to the transforming power of the Word of God! It's not a book of ancient history. It's the story of our salvation. It's a book of promises made and promises kept and promises still pending. It tells me Who God is and who I am created and called to be. Martin Luther said that the Bible is the manger that holds the Christ Child. Open it up and, by God's grace, with the Holy Spirit's help, you will find Him in its pages. And He will show you the Father. And that encounter will reshape your life, and the Word shall not return to Heaven empty but fruitful, having done its divine job. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham