

Those of you who know me and have heard me preach, you know by now that I like to do sermon series. I look for common threads in the lectionary scripture that can weave a central message over several weeks. One thing I observed in the 1 Peter passages is the word “living.” He describes things as a living hope, a living word, or a living stone. That makes sense, since we’re in the Easter season and emphasizing new life and resurrection. So, I invite you on this journey through the Easter season as we explore the “Living” all around us.

Peter’s letter is written to Jewish Christians who were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor, yet Peter’s words offer encouragement to suffering Christians everywhere. Since we are in a time of suffering and could use some encouragement, I chose to focus on 1 Peter during this Easter season. “Peter reminds us that we have been born anew, that there is a spark within us that cannot die because the God of life has spoken it into being within us.”¹

I love that God speaks things into being. That is another common thread throughout the Bible. The gospel of John tells us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”² John is talking about Jesus and continues to say that the Word became flesh. Before Jesus became human, he existed as God’s living Word, in which God spoke into being.

We also see in Genesis that God speaks creation into being: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”³; “God said, ‘Let there be space between the waters to separate the waters from the heavens from the waters of the earth.’ And it was so.”⁴ The rest of the creation story continues in this pattern: God said, “Let there be _____, and it was so.” Creator God speaks life into being. God’s Word is spoken into us as part of God’s creation, and we still carry that spark within us.

God is still speaking creation into being. God is still speaking to us and we’re evolving and carrying that spark within us into the world. We become co-creators with God for the world and the life God wants us to live. There are times when we must take initiative, but there are also times when we need to be led by the Spirit.

We can begin by taking initiative to listen to the Spirit, to listen for God’s living word. One way we can do this is through a spiritual practice called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for “listening for God.” We do this practice in Sunday LIFT. We read scripture and listen to what God is saying to us through the scripture. The Bible is not just a history book. It’s a living sacred word that God speaks to us in fresh and new ways. Sometimes, you receive the word, phrase, or image that you really need to hear at that moment. And sometimes it’s a challenge word that you have to contemplate on for a while.

I was in a weekly group one time that practiced *lectio divina*. I was really skeptical in the beginning, so each week I wrote down the word or phrase that sparkled or spoke to me. Often, I didn’t know what

¹ Jane Herring, *Disciplines 2020*, 146.

² John 1:1-3 *NRSV*

³ Genesis 1:3. *NLT*

⁴ Genesis 1:6-7 *NLT*

they meant at the time. At the end of the year, I went back and looked at the weekly words, and they formed several sentences that led me to my call. Each week, God gave me one word that eventually led me into a new life.

Some may say, that sounds hokey and that you hear what you want to hear, but that's true for life in general, isn't it? We may interpret someone's words to mean what we want to hear. Likewise, our ears fall deaf when someone says something we don't want to hear. We do the same with God, yet God speaks, none-the-less.

I've shared before that I heard God speak to me while Andy and I were hiking up Multnomah Falls. I had been sensing my call into ministry, but I was really arm-wrestling God about it. During that hike in the middle of God's beautiful creation, I hear clear as day, "Go to seminary." God spoke a new life into being in that moment.

Last year, Andy dragged me on another hike on the Iron Mountain Trailhead. I was not listening at all; in fact, I was doing a lot of talking. I was grumbling and complaining with almost every step. About half way, Andy had had enough. I was totally ruining his hike with my constant blabbering. He said, "Remember that time when God spoke to you on a hike? Maybe God will speak to you again." That was his polite way of saying, "Shut up!" We both knew that I couldn't hear God if I was the one doing all the talking.

So, I took his advice. I stopped complaining and asked God if he had a word for me that day. After a few moments of quiet, I heard, "Go." My first response was, "Go where?" I didn't get an answer right away. I had to sit with that and process it and allow the Spirit to lead me when it was

time. That was the first indication from God that my time at Chapel of the Hills was coming to a close. After much contemplation and time, I realized I was being led by the Spirit to a new appointment.

God's living word comes to us in so many ways. Sometimes it's just the word we need to hear through scripture or a friend. Sometimes it's the same word or phrase that keeps coming to us several times over a week. Sometimes it's a word that stays with us, no matter how hard we try to un-hear it off. When God speaks into our lives, it is everlasting and enduring.

God's living word is like a little patch of sunlight breaking through the clouds on a drizzly, gray day. The unexpected rainbow that appears during or just after a rain shower. That little yellow bird sitting on top of a flowering bush. The deer and turkeys making their way through the pasture. The wildflowers that cover a hill or a lone flower in a field. God's living word adds richness and beauty to our mundane or hopeless lives. God speaks this beauty into our lives.

God is speaking into our lives right now, about how we can change our lives after this pandemic, into a life that God is calling us to live. We have been shaken and awakened out of our sleep, out of what we have called "a normal life." Writer Brene Brown said, "Our pre-corona existence was not normal...we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate, and lack." None of these are part of God's creation.

Brown continued: "We should not long to return [to this life]. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new

garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.” We can see a glimpse of this new garment by looking at how creation has been affected during this lockdown. The smog has lifted in many cities. People can hear birds singing, now that noise has been reduced. Marine animals aren’t so stressed by ocean noise. Seismic activity and greenhouse gases have reduced. God is speaking into our lives right now to create a new life that is more representative to God’s intention for creation.

Peter describes that as having “genuine mutual love,” that we should “love one another deeply from the heart” (v.22) and that includes God’s creation. God is speaking this new life of genuine love into being. What living word is God speaking into your life? I invite you to listen for “the living and enduring word of God” (v.23).

God of Creation, Source of All Life, Your Word sustains all life and brings order amidst the chaos. We are part of this Living Word from the beginning. Today, we say “yes” to your wish for a new world, for the flourishing of creation. Through prayer and action, we agree to play our part so that the will of heaven may be more present here on earth. Speak your living word to us. We are listening. Amen.