

**October 8, 2023**  
**“The Word Beyond the Words”**  
**Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20/ Psalm 19**  
**Pastor Tim**

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Holy One, my rock and my redeemer.”

Our word for today, as it so happens, is “Word.”

Translated from the Hebrew, *dabar*, and from the Greek, *logos*. As in the Word of God.

When we read scripture each Sunday, we’re invited to respond: “This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.”

Not because scripture itself is the Word of God, or literally the words of God, but because the words we find in the Bible, even through all the political processes that pulled them together into canon as we know them now, serve to point us to the WORD of God.

Inspired by God, God-breathed, they serve to point us to the divine wisdom, truth, spirit – or what Matthew Fox and others refer to as the “creative energy” – BEYOND the words.

To say “The word of God for the people of God” is to acknowledge the divine wisdom, the truth, the spirit, the creative energy waiting to be discovered and unleashed in our reading and hearing – found within and BEYOND the words themselves.

A gift, asserts the Psalmist, “More to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.”

A gift for which we are appropriately thankful, and so we say each Sunday, “Thanks be to God.”

And to be clear, the Bible as we know it is not the only place where the WORD of God is found. As they say in the United Church of Christ, “God is still speaking.”

God is STILL speaking. Amen!

To confine the Word of God to the Bible is a form of idolatry, deifying the words and not the Word. Or as Jesus makes clear, deifying the laws at the expense of the spirit.

God is still speaking. More on that to come.

We find *dabar* on top of Mt. Sinai, in our reading from Exodus. God's sharing with Moses and Aaron what would become known as the 10 commandments, the Decalogue, the core of Jewish law and the core of God's ongoing covenant with God's people.

"Then God spoke, SPOKE, all these words: ..." Spoke a translation of *dabar* in verb form. God spoke. Wisdom. Truth. Spirit. Creative energy.

God is still speaking.

And we find the spirit of *dabar*, though not the Hebrew word itself, in the story of Creation. God speaking Creation into existence, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, out of the void.

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."

God's creative energy at work from the very beginning, and to be sure, long before we humans showed up. Long before humanity had words to take up the impossible task of articulating the divine mystery.

And that life-giving, life-sustaining creative energy, God's WORD, still at work. Ongoing.

God is still speaking. Because of, and in spite of, our words, God is still speaking. As Matthew Fox puts it:

*"... all of creation contains the living wisdom and word of God, and it is for all of us. The human word is only one among billions of words that God has spoken and that therefore emanate from the divine splendor. To make contact with wisdom is to go beyond human words ... We are invited to return to the many billions of years of ongoing creation that also constitute God's talking."*

Which brings us again to Psalm 19.

“The heavens are TELLING the glory of God; and the firmament PROCLAIMS God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth SPEECH, and night to night DECLARES knowledge. There is no SPEECH, nor are there WORDS; their VOICE is not heard; yet their VOICE goes out through all the earth, and their WORDS to the end of the world.”

Creation is speaking, and continues to speak, the WORD of God. Without words or voice, God continues to speak through Creation, if only we stop long enough to listen. And join the chorus.

Creation, in fact, is crying out, if only we stop long enough to listen and join the chorus. If only we stop creating at the expense of Creation, stop deifying power and profit at the expense of people and the planet. Start making decisions by answering the question that Wisdom herself asks: “Is it loving? Is it just? Is it life-giving?”

“The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity,” wrote the 11<sup>th</sup>-century mystic, Hildegarde of Bingen. “This Word manifest itself in every creature.”

“Every creature is a word of God and is a book about God,” wrote the 13<sup>th</sup>-century mystic, Meister Eckhart.

The Word of God, divine wisdom, truth, spirit, creative energy, manifested IN and expressed THROUGH the heavens and the earth. Through every single living thing.

Including us. Including you and me.

Matthew Fox again: “The truly energetic creative word of God, Dabhar, will not be imprisoned, will not be locked up for long. Our spiritual task is to get out of its way enough that we might be filled with it and go about our task of healing, celebrating, and co-creating. For Dabhar wishes to be incarnate in us.”

Incarnate in us as it was incarnate in Jesus, the Word incarnate – through whom we know God’s love-filled, life-giving Word.

Here we find the Greek word, *logos* – presented most famously and poetically in the first words of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Logos, the Word.”

Or continuing, using Matthew Fox's substitution of "creative energy":

*The Creative Energy was with God  
And the Creative Energy was God.  
It was with God in the beginning.  
Through it all things came to be,  
Not one thing had its being but through it.  
All that came to be had life in it  
And that life was the light of persons,  
A light that shines in the dark,  
A light that darkness could not overpower ...  
The Creative Energy was the true light  
that enlightens all people;  
and it was coming into the world.  
It was in the world  
that had its being through it,  
and the world did not know it ...  
But to all who did accept it  
it gave power to become children of God ...  
The Creative energy was made flesh,  
it pitched its tent among us,  
and we saw its glory ...*

It pitched its tent among us in Jesus. And Jesus came that it might pitch its tent in us. That we might join in the chorus of Creation. That we might enter the flow of God's ongoing creative energy as co-creators of the world God desires.

With great power comes great responsibility. And here we come back to the Hebrew word, *dabar*.

To the complexity and layering of the Hebrew language that so often gets lost in our English translations. *Dabar* doesn't just mean "word"; it means "word" AND "deed." Not one without the other.

Our words mean little, if anything, without action.

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there WAS light."

"Let no one deceive you with empty words," declares the author of Ephesians. Words without corresponding action, or words with action that betrays the words themselves.

Words that do not lead beyond themselves to manifestation of the WORD of God. To divine wisdom, truth, spirit. To the ongoing flow of God's endlessly creative, life-giving energy.

The WORD beyond the words. The spirit within and beyond God's law and decrees and precepts and commandments, which as the Psalmist suggests, revives the soul. Makes wise the simple. Rejoices the heart. Enlightens the eyes.

The WORD that endures forever, long after all our words are forgotten. Again: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." And so the light continues. God is still speaking.

In the spirit of *dabar*, Frederick Buechner suggests that:

*"... to say something is to do something. 'I love you.' 'I hate you.' 'I forgive you.' 'I am afraid of you.' Who knows what such words do, but whatever it is, it can never be undone. Something that lay hidden in the heart is irrevocably released through speech into time, is given substance and tossed like a stone into the pool of history, where the concentric rings lap out endlessly.*

*Words are power, essentially the power of creation. By my words I both discover and create who I am. By my words I elicit a word from you. Through our converse we create each other."*

Words are power, essentially the power of creation. Or, as we know all too well, words can easily assume the power of destruction and division and despair. And death.

These are words, with their resulting actions, that interrupt the flow of divine creative energy. Or empty words without action that diminish the flow of divine creative energy.

We hear them every day. We no doubt utter them ourselves.

But we are called to another way. To another word. The very Way and Word of God manifest in Jesus – marked by love and justice, leading to life. And life abundant.

"This ... word is truly creative energy and not cheap or impotent," says Matthew Fox again. "Here too is a link with the prophetic word, the creative energy of the prophets who call for new creation and the letting go of death-dealing ways of living. The prophetic word too is a part of the flow of the one creative energy – it breaks out when

this flow is dammed by greed, corruption, boredom, or injustice. For Dabhar will not be kept down."

Dabar, logos, the Word beyond words, will not be kept down.

"Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts ... and the work of our hands and the witness of our lives, be acceptable to you, O Holy One.

May we join with the rest of Creation, adding our voices to the voiceless chorus. Manifesting within and pointing beyond us to your Word beyond our words, to your divine wisdom and truth and spirit. Unleashing the flow of creative, love-expanding, life-giving, life-sustaining energy in a world so desperately in need of it.

Let me close with a prayer from the scholar of Hebrew scriptures, Walter Brueggemann, from his book, *Prayers for a Privileged People*:

*We are a people with many words and much talk:  
creeds and  
ads and  
propaganda and  
slogans and  
sound bytes.*

*We keep listening among these words for comfort,  
and we find ourselves made  
anxious by cacophony.*

*And then – the din is broken;  
You speak and we enter the zone of address.  
You speak and we are called by name.  
You name and we are summoned –  
summoned, commanded, sent.*

*We hear and cringe and pause ...  
overwhelmed by mandate.  
We listen and you speak again:  
you utter words of presence,  
promises of protection,  
assurances of solidarity.*

*We breathe easier, still afraid,  
but on our way, at risk, not alone.*

*Give us good ears in these days,  
that we may hear the mandate  
and listen for assurance.*

*That even such as us may speak you well,  
you in sovereignty,  
you in fidelity,  
you in your sadness  
and in your newness.*

*Let your word be fleshed through our tongues and  
on our lips,  
that our fleshed verbiage may truly echo  
your word made flesh via Nazareth.*

God is still speaking, even through us.

May it be so.