

-How many of you have ever had to do a co-presentation with one or more people? I have to admit, sometimes doing a presentation with someone else can be brutal (especially if you don't really know the other person). Don't get me wrong, I have been a part of presentations with a partner or teams that have worked brilliantly and dare I say were even, fun? But, I have also been a part of ones that were really terrible. Perhaps that worst one was a presentation that I gave in high school in US History class. I was paired up with (now don't take this the wrong way) a football player, super-jock guy named Colin. We were presenting on the US Bill of Rights and how it was formed. I wasn't super excited to be paired up with Colin, but I guess he was tolerable. We decided in our presentation (we only met once beforehand), to split up every other amendment in the original Bill of Rights and give a brief synopsis using sources we were working with in class. I remember I presented on the First Amendment (freedom of religion) and then turned it over to Colin who started talking about the Second Amendment (which is probably the most famous of all: right to bear arms). I remember Colin calmly giving details and him starting to say things about how "several writers of the Bill of Rights died because they wrote this amendment bravely" and started thinking to myself: I don't remember reading that in our textbook. We continued down the list and Colin started to talk about the Fourth Amendment (right against unlawful searches/seizures) and I finally realized: he has no idea what he is talking about. Finally, our highschool teacher interrupts us angrily and asks: have you done any work on this? Because, right now, you are just paying lip service to something else. The Bill of Right is too important to not realize what you are saying. I was horrified! Turns out Colin had not done his work, had procrastinated to such a point that he felt like he didn't have the time to read the sources we had discussed in class and instead found "cliff notes" online. Needless to say, our grade on the partner presentation was not stellar. -I will never forget my teacher's words to us, however horrified I was, that "this is too important to not realize what you are saying." How many of us don't take the time to realize what we are saying in different contexts?

-Though he wasn't giving a partner presentation, there is evidence that the apostle Peter fell into this reality too. "And on the way Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

-So, the word that Peter used("Messiah") is and was a loaded term in Judaism. "Messiah", or in Hebrew: "the anointed one" was historically believed as the one whom God will send to restore Israel and creation. The Messiah was widely believed to symbolize God's answer to God's peoples' prayers of deliverance and salvation. Now exactly what and how the Messiah was actually going to go about doing this was under wide interpretation across all of Judaism. Clearly Peter had his own expectation of what

Jesus as Messiah would look like.

-Remember here, most of the ancient Jewish population at the time of Jesus was under severe occupation by the Roman Empire. It may come as no surprise that there were brutal tensions between Rome and the Jews during this period, and many lost their lives as part of this tension.

-Peter it seems then, with this in mind, really hasn't paid much attention to what Jesus has been saying and doing up to this point. Instead, he is seeing this movement that Jesus is starting purely as a political one. "Jesus is taking on and going to overthrow the Roman Empire," he is most likely thinking to himself. "And I am going to be here to witness it." Not only does Peter and most (if not all the disciples) think this is going to happen, but they are going to be rightly installed as the 2nd lieutenants to Jesus the Messiah. "Who is the greatest?" they argue not to do ministry but to accept a lieutenant governor position in this new Kingdom that Jesus is bringing?

-Clearly, they don't know what they are talking about. Peter and the disciples are using language to bring about their own status and prestige instead of living out what Jesus is actually doing. No wonder then, Jesus has to say "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but human things."

-Language and understanding to the best of our ability what we are saying matters.

-As we have been witnessing in the last couple of weeks, you have probably caught on that the New Testament Book of James also has something to say about this. "With [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so." Actions and words of a Christian matter.

-We, of course, are living in a radical age where it has been said Mexicans bring drugs and are rapists, women can be grabbed by their genitals, and immigrants come from s-hole countries. It's an "un-pc" world where cable news commentators tout and compare the freedom of living in the United States to now saying "whatever we want." Sure, call Jesus the Messiah, or King, or ruler. Call Jesus friend, lover, good guy: call him whatever you want! It doesn't matter. It's an un-pc world. Or does it matter? My highschool teachers' words have been haunting me quite a bit lately: "this is too important to not realize what we are saying."

-In an age of fake news, it's easy for us to see the freedom that the Messiah brings as an individual right to do and say whatever we want. So I ask the question, is this the freedom that Jesus died and rose again for and what we as his followers speak to? I think not. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." Maybe instead of the twisted and sick interpretation of Jesus endorsing physical abuse which this text has been for used again and again for (woman need to subject to their

husbands even in abuse because that's "their cross to be bear") Maybe Jesus is talking about a different kind of denial. Maybe the denial here that Jesus lifts up is the temptation and glorification of "individual freedom" to say and do anything we please.

-A seminary professor that I took a class from once said: "The Christian life is a call to transition from a 'freedom to' to a 'freedom for'. Christ's death and resurrection doesn't *free us to* say garbage about our neighbor. Instead we are released from the bonds and guilt of sin and *freed for* serving and loving that same neighbor."

-The Roman Catholics have a blessing that they do (many of you have probably seen it) where the person makes a sign of the cross on their forehead, on their mouth, and on their chest. It's most common to see priests do this before giving a sermon. The gesture, from the research I have done, is probably 1,000 years old and it simply means: "May the Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart." That's the power of a ritual gesture: it brings us back or reminds us of something. Maybe it's time to start holding onto the traditions that bring us back to relationship, and toss out the ones that don't.

-Many of you have heard the line attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times, use words if necessary." What an incredible statement to bring us back to being freed for the neighbor (maybe we need to frame that statement and put it up somewhere in our church).

-May you be brought back and reminded of the freedom in Jesus Christ and energized to see the neighbor in new ways. May we, as a church community, help keep each other accountable and actively working to understand the language we do use. For it is too important and too much at stake to not understand, as best we can, what we are saying. Amen.