“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” John 6:63b

I grow so weary of words sometimes.

I’m not alone. One of the better poets of the twentieth century wrote, “The best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.” The ones with the least to say, say the most—with passion and conviction and persuasive power. The one who have the most to say, say nothing at all. They sit there in silence.

I grow so weary of words sometimes. There are so many of them for one thing. We’re surrounded by them, inundated with them. They come at us from every direction. We’ve got podcasts and broadcasts and TED Talks. Proud tongues laying claim to heaven. We live in a constant state of TMI—too much information. There’s no time to think, to reflect as we float in an endless stream.

And that leads to the second problem. Everybody is spinning. I don’t mean they’re turning about an axis. They trim words, massage words, manipulate words and use them to obfuscate rather than to clarify and bring understanding. They use their words to worm their way into our heads. They sell us ideas. They sell us soap. We live in a constant state of TMS: too much selling. It’s no wonder we’ve become suspicious of what anybody says. It seems everyone’s got an agenda.

What about you? I mean, we’re about to you launch into this world. And you’re are men of words! What makes you think your words are any different? Why do you think you will be heard above the din? What makes you think you can have any kind of impact? I assume you want to have an impact because otherwise you wouldn’t be here.

Well let me remind you that of the circumstances around the words you’ve chosen as your class motto. Jesus was dealing with a whole crowd of people who were weary of words. Of his words. He had said too many impossible things. “What, this guy claims he came down from heaven? He’s more powerful than Moses? He’s going to give us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink? That’s a hard saying! He gives bread from heaven? Trust him and have eternal life? No wait a minute, wait a minute. Get this! Now he’s saying, “You find this hard to believe? What if I told you I was going to go back up to heaven where I used to be?” Who does he think he is? What kind of authority is he claiming for himself?

What was Jesus’ reaction? Did he seek to tone it down? To schmooze them a little? To say, “Well, maybe that Bread of life thing was a little bit over the top. Can’t you catch a metaphor when you hear it? Not at all! He declares: “The words I speak to you: they are spirit and they are life.”

My Strong Word Gives Life

1. Life to you
2. Life through you
3. The crest of Jesus’ popularity in Galilee had come, and it turned into a wave crashing on the shore. Most of his disciples were turning away. Then turns to his own chosen Twelve and asks one of the most poignant and powerful questions in Scripture “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Do you hear our Savior’s love there? A wounded love, a rejected love—but more than that. A love that is *willing* to be wounded. *Willing* to face rejection and sorrow. Bound and determined to go to Jerusalem where he will suffer rejection. Where he will lay his body down on the cross and suffer his Father’s curse on sin, our sin. Our curse. He’s willing and ready to die our death to set us free. Jesus is not looking for pity. He knows what he’s going to do. He just wants to give his disciples a chance to confess that they still want to go with him.

Still, no matter how we try to dress it up, rejection is never easy. Yes, we can blithely say, “Haters gonna hate,” but still it hurts. And as the mockery of all that is good increases, the tearing down of all that is lovely, beautiful and fine, it gets hard to hold the line. As Christian virtue is scorned, and the very idea of sin and of a Savior from sin is subject to open ridicule by the masses, it’s very tempting to tone it down. To fudge a little. Some days in ministry, you’re going to wonder what in all the world you are doing here. Whether what you say makes any difference at all.

So, Physician and Doctor of Souls, heal thyself! Preacher to others, preach to yourself! At that time, remember the words Jesus speaks. “My strong Word gives life!” Whatever doubts we may struggle with at times, Peter really speaks up for all of us when he says, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the strong words of eternal life.” It’s like he’s saying, “Lord, I’m weary of words. All the useless talk and chatter of humanity that just leads us deeper down into sin’s rathole. Lord, I’m of all the false directions people give and fake news they spout. And Lord, I’m so weary of all my idols. The false gods that lead me to my ruin. All the lies I tell myself. All the lies the Accuser pounds away at me with. All the voices of choices that call me away from you into eternal emptiness and death.

Lord to whom shall we go—once you speak, there’s only one voice that matters. One path to life. You have the words of eternal life. Your words are spirit and life. Lord I can endure the rejection and the angry words and the silent contempt of all around me so long as you keep speaking. You say, “Forgiven!” And I am forgiven. You say, “Live!” And my heart leaps up in faith. You say, “Follow me!” And I say, “Lord, just show me the way, your way, for you are the way, the truth, and the life!”

1. And to that he has called you. He has put his strong, life giving Word in your mouth to speak it to others. On this campus, unlike in most places, graduation is not big day. We all know it’s kind of an anti-climax. The really big day, the truly miraculous day happened yesterday. Call day. The Lord Christ at God’s right hand was giving gifts to his Church. He was calling them through the Church into specific ministries with specific flocks in specific place to be his mouth, his voice. I know it seems incredible. Even arrogant. How can you, mere men, claim to be God’s voices, God’s mouth? Do you actually think you have that kind of authority? That’s crazy talk!

But really, hasn’t that been the whole point of all our training and study together here. We learn to listen. Listen. Listen. You don’t want bring your own thoughts, your own ideas and your own words, however powerful and eloquent they may seem. Jesus says, “The words ***I*** speak are spirit and they are life.” You’ve learned to put all your emphasis on that little Word “I”—meaning Jesus. Your plan for preaching is the same as the hope you have for yourself: “Lord to whom shall we go, ***you*** not me, not anyone else, you alone have the Words that give life. If I do not speak your word, let me not utter a single syllable.”

Of course, not all will accept what you say as God’s own voice. Do you think it will go better for you than your Master? It remains true: no one can come to Jesus through you unless the Father has enabled him.

The tragic thing is, our society is busily tearing down all authority. They tear down the government so that now, in America, it’s as if we’re screaming at each other in rage over a deep deep chasm. Who cares about working together for the common good? People hold the family, the basic bedrock of society in contempt. Used to be everyone knew what a family was. One man, one woman. Children. Death us do part. Now family is whatever we want it to be. We define it according to our whims. The same thing happens to Christians. Pastors who speak the truth, but not the whole truth. Who trim and shape the Word according to their own ideas. And Christians who think they can shop around for pastoral advice rather than go to the one our Lord has called and commissioned to serve us. We can always Google a second opinion if we don’t like what we’re hearing from the pulpit.

The tragedy is: people think that makes them free, when in fact it makes them slaves. They are slaves to crowd sourced opinions. They are ruled by the shifting winds of the cause of the day. They are driven by their own changing and changeable feelings. Folks think they are free but they’ve become slaves to faceless shepherds who really don’t know them. Like a dove flying back and forth across a faceless deep, they find no place to rest, no solid ground on which they can settle.

As we see this tragedy unfold before our eyes, don’t you think that Jesus would say over America the same thing he once said when he wept over Jerusalem, “Oh America, America, how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers its chicks.” “I have compassion for the crowds for they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.” And what is the answer to that yearning cry?

You! “Here are my servants whom I have sent; he who listens to you, listens to me, and he who listens to me listens to him who sent me. My strong word gives life.” Preach it brothers and give life to the dead and call into being things that don’t exist. Learn to say with Luther, “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic, and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience.” Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God’s strong Word will not pass away. God’s strong Word gives life. Go out and preach it. Breathe on these slain that they may live! Do more than make a difference. Do more than have an impact. That is too small a thing, too trifling an ambition. Go out there and make this sad old world brand new!

Amen