



The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (B)
September 30, 2018
10:30 Eucharist and Sacrament of Baptism
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

One of the things I enjoy in Grand Rapids is being a member of Meijer Gardens. In the most recent membership magazine, there is an article entitled, “Chrysanthemums and More!” I wanted to share a couple of sentences from the article.

The article says: “Resplendent displays of thousands of blooms, anchored by a palette of purple and burgundy hues, landmark our interior and exterior locations... At the centerpiece of the exhibition is the...Seasonal Display Greenhouse with signature specialty mums...” (“Chrysanthemums and More! September 21-October 28.” Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. Autumn, 2018, Volume 9, Issue 4. p. 5)

Are not these words amazingly descriptive as well as provocative? Do they entice you to want to go and see the mums at Meijer Gardens? I hope so.

I believe that the words from the article are engaging descriptive words in a few sentences, words and image painting which are proof positive that words can be powerful. I believe we can conclude that there is power in the words which we hear, in words which we read and in words which we speak. Here are a couple of examples for us to consider.

On Wednesday this past week, I met with colleagues from the Kaufman Interfaith Institute steering committee. We met to plan the upcoming Interfaith Thanksgiving Service slated for November 19.

Just like last year, I marveled at sitting at a table with over a dozen different religious traditions represented, a wonderful display of collegiality and respect. Words spoken and heard had much to do with respecting many faith traditions which will celebrate the need to give thanks in a Service planned and attended by many different religious Traditions. Those Traditions include Christian, Buddhist, Baha’i, Hindu and others.

On Thursday of this past week, a number of us from our Outreach Ministry met with the Principal of East Leonard Elementary School. We met to discern how St. Mark’s can continue its support of the School in new ways. It was a time of collaboration, sharing of ideas and offering the Principal our support for the future. Our words were sincere, and our actions will put flesh on those words.

In a few minutes, we will renew our Baptismal Vows and also baptize little Avery Lynn Ruis. We will use words from *The Book of Common Prayer* which are indeed powerful and affective. Spoken words and the pouring of blessed water accompanied by words from the Gospel of Matthew will seal Avery as Christ’s own and a member of the Christian Tradition. These words will be words which affect a change. Avery will be offered to God as a Child of God forever. Words spoken, embraced and cause for celebration!

In the first reading from The Book of Esther, words spoken on her part enabled a dramatic change. They enabled King Ahasuerus to assure Queen Esther that she and her people would be safe from harm. The passage goes on to say that the King’s announcement enabled the Jews to turn from “sorrow into gladness... and from mourning into a holiday.” Words spoken, embraced and celebrated!

In the Gospel from Mark, John, the beloved disciple, tells Jesus that someone was casting out demons in the Name of Jesus. In words familiar to many of us, Jesus says, “Whoever is not against us is for us.” He goes on to say that no one should put a “stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe” in him.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we hear words and speak words which have come down to us in the Christian Tradition. At the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples to go forth to “Baptize all nations in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. We take those words literally, and we continue to put them into action. The Sacrament of Baptism initiates a baby, a child or an adult into an unbroken tradition over two thousand year’s old.

The words and the actions which accompany those words will affect a kind of indelible mark on Avery’s soul, as she is sealed as Christ’s own forever. That word, “forever”, means just that, ‘forever’. No one will be able to take away her baptism and all that it means. As her parents and family rejoice in what will soon happen, so, too, will all of us, rejoice.

As a community of faith, Avery will be baptized in the midst of all of us assembled here. Her baptism will be recorded in our current Register of Baptisms, a book which joins other such books dating back to the beginning of the Parish in 1836. Thumbing through those books and page after page, there are thousands of names of those baptized in this place. As of this coming Friday, the anniversary of the Parish, St. Mark’s has been about fulfilling the command to “baptize in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” for 182 years.

I hope that each of us will pay attention to the words of the Sacrament as we renew our own baptismal vows. A question for us might just be whether we take those words seriously or not? Do we believe what we profess? Do we take to heart powerful and potentially enriching the descriptive words which remind us that we are Christ’s own forever?

Words are powerful! As we know, words can be uplifting and affirming. They can be replete with joy and goodwill.

‘Other’ words can be destructive and undermine relationships. They can be demeaning and hurtful. As the beloved of God, we are called to make sure that our words are spoken from a good heart and that they will be life-giving for others.

I most often begin my Sunday messages with words from Psalm 19. Let us ask God to give us the grace to hear and embrace them. These words can enrich us and perhaps become a daily prayer: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my Strength and my Redeemer.” Amen.