

Sermon: 6 Pentecost, Proper 7, Year A  
June 22, 2008 (9:00 Combined Service)  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Liverpool NY  
The Rev. Carrie Schofield-Broadbent  
"What Stands In Our Way?"

Studies have shown that only seven percent of what we understand when someone is communicating to us comes from their actual words. The rest of the message comes from non-verbals: body language, tone, context, timing, etc. Only seven percent! No wonder so many people complain about the limits of e-mail communication, or even letter writing. Most of how we understand a message doesn't come from actual words.

Which is another reason among many why I wish I had been able to experience the whole Jesus-on-earth event first hand. We can get some sense of the context in which Jesus was speaking from historical and cultural facts and from looking at the text in the original Greek – but really, that only gets us so far. Sometimes, I really want to know, what was it like when Jesus said what he did – was he having a stressful day, was it really hot out and people were cranky, was he totally serene and choosing his words carefully, or are we getting a scene from like 4 hours into a lesson the disciples just weren't getting. What was the context? Was Jesus using splashy, huge metaphors to prove a point, or were these carefully crafted? Those are things we just won't know.

That's probably one of the reasons the Christian community over all these years has preserved, not one or two or three, but *four* Gospel accounts of Christ's life. When I want to get a richer picture of what Jesus was saying, I find it helpful to look to other translations of the biblical text. It can't replace non-verbal communication, but it's a tool that we've got.

There are parts of this week's Gospel lesson that quite frankly, I find troubling. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword... I have come to set man against father, daughter against her mother..." *What's up with that, Jesus?* Without digging deeper into what the full meaning of this text might be, it sounds, at least to my ears, pretty inconsistent with who I understand Jesus to be.

For another perspective on the text, let's turn to a biblical paraphrase called *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. He's gone back to the original Hebrew and Greek of the Bible and then turned the text into words that resonate better with our post-modern culture. Feel free to skim the text in your insert as I read this different version, see where the text gains more dimensions. (I'm going to start about 1/3 of the way down, with the sparrows part)

*"What's the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right? And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So don't be intimidated by all this bully talk. You're worth more than a million canaries.*

*"Stand up for me against world opinion and I'll stand up for you before my Father in heaven. If you turn tail and run, do you think I'll cover for you?"*

*"Don't think I've come to make life cozy. I've come to cut—make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law—cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don't deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don't deserve me."*

*"If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me."*

I think the question that the text begs of us is: **What stands in the way of us proclaiming the Gospel boldly?**

I think, through all of this language that it so difficult for us to process, Jesus is saying – *No excuses, folks. There's nothing to fear. God loves you. I love you. You are being called to preach the Gospel. No, it's not going to be easy, but it'll be worth it. It's not going to be easy, but no excuses, folks. I need you to do this. Proclaim the Good News boldly.*

**What stands in the way of us proclaiming the Gospel boldly?**

Fear of rejection? It's certainly not the latest fad to run around talking about how great Jesus is. I'm sure we would face a little rejection if all we did was preach about the fundamentals of Christian doctrine and the finer points of biblical criticism. In fact, that's probably never been cool. Jesus didn't even do that. He told stories. He spoke from his own experience. He didn't just pontificate ad nauseam, he listened, he was present, he built relationships, and he shared meals and journeys. We aren't called to just preach the Good News with our words, we called to proclaim the Good News in ways that make sense to us and to others. No it's not going to be easy, we may challenge some people, but that's OK. We're called to proclaim the Good News through words and actions. We called to live the Gospel and the follow the way, not just talk about it. Centered, Authentic, and Godly people naturally attract others, in any culture.

**What stands in the way of us proclaiming the Gospel boldly?**

Some of us are afraid we don't know enough. I fall into this trap too! (Believe me, you don't learn 100% about God, human kind, and the cosmic mysteries in 3 years of seminary!) How many of us are sometimes afraid we don't know enough to proclaim the Gospel boldly?

Well, here's the thing, we're not called to preach the Bible – we're called by Jesus to proclaim the Gospel, which literally means the Good News. Proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News, is not about preaching the Bible, any more than a trip is about the map. The Bible is just one way that we experience the Good News.

We're called to tell the story of the Good News, as we experience it. So, even if you don't know what Lot's wife's name was, or in which testament you find the book of I Chronicles... We all know the Good News. We all can share stories about healing that we've witnessed. We can all tell the story of God's love, of true forgiveness, of God's impossibly lavish grace. We can tell the story of knocking, and doors being opened, of asking and receiving, of being lost and found.

There's nothing standing in our way of proclaiming the Good News boldly. God loves us more than million canaries or sparrows. We may be stretched beyond our comfort zones. Jesus may use that "sword" to cut through that which is restraining us from proclaiming the Good News boldly. And God's radical Good News of welcome, forgiveness, healing, and grace may pull against what others hold tightly and challenge them. But, this is what we're called to, even though it may be tough sometimes. And apparently, Jesus isn't buying our excuses.

As a people loved, nurtured, and sent, let us go forth into the world, proclaiming the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Thanks be to God.*