

Wednesday, April 10, 2019 – Lent Midweek VI
“The Gospel in Your Words”

1 Peter 3:15

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Dialogical Structure

Adapted from CSL “The Gospel in Seven Words”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I don't think he planned ahead to have the perfect answer. He probably didn't spend six Wednesday nights in Lent trying to piece together the perfect response. He was caught off guard. Put on the spot. Taken by surprise. The answer he gave was still pretty good. He used more than seven words, but I guess we won't hold that against him.

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked the disciples. Peter spoke up on their behalf: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:15–16). It was a good answer. Jesus himself commended it. “Blessed are you, Simon Son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). It's a good reminder that when we confess the gospel faithfully, it's not because we are so wise to have figured it out. It's not because we are so smart, or so clever. It's because God has come to us. It's because God, through his word, has revealed himself to us.

Peter also knew what it was like to give a wrong answer. It wasn't too long after his faithful confession that he found himself in the courtyard of the high priest. It was the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested. The disciples had scattered in fear. Again, Peter was caught off guard. Again, he was put on the spot. But this time didn't turn out so well. *Three* times in that courtyard he was asked about his connection to Jesus. *Three* times people approached him, searching for his connection to Jesus. *Three* times Peter denied his Lord. “I do not know the man!” he insisted. And the rooster crowed.

I don't know what was going through Peter's mind some thirty years later when he wrote a letter that we now call 1 Peter. Maybe he was thinking about those two different answers. Maybe he wanted to spare us the shame he bore early on that first Good Friday. Maybe that's why he insisted, “Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

All this season of Lent we've been thinking about how we would summarize the reason for our hope as Christians. We've been preparing ourselves to give an answer, to share the good news of Jesus with people in *our* lives.

And so I'll ask you: after these weeks of Lent thinking about the gospel in seven words, do you feel more prepared? As you think about the people in your life that do not believe, or who have fallen away, are you ready to proclaim what they so badly need to hear? If not, then I'm glad you're here tonight! Hopefully you'll leave with a few more ideas.

One of the things I've appreciated about the work we've done together this Lent is that it has given me a whole bunch of ways to think about what God has done for us in Christ. There's no one single way of summarizing the gospel. When Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" he could have given many different correct answers. The people in your life who need to hear the gospel probably need to hear it in different ways, too. Each of them is in their own unique situation and has their own unique experiences. We probably need more than one way of confessing the gospel if we are to be prepared to share our hope.

So, what I'd like to do this evening is spend a few minutes with you reflecting on the various responses that you have sent me. I've been really pleased with the response. At the start of the service I had received 38 different versions of the gospel in seven words. Well, most of you kept it to seven words. They are on your handout. (I'll read a few more that came in since those were printed.) In just a moment I'm going to read through all the responses on the list. As I do so, I'd like you to circle or star some of the descriptions you find most helpful. Not just for sharing the gospel with others, but for your own benefit. There are plenty of times when we need the encouragement and comfort of the gospel. You may even copy them on a notecard to keep in your wallet or purse.

So here's how we're going to proceed. You've got 38 responses on your insert. I didn't put any names on them. I want to read through them with you and get your reaction. Star the ones that are most helpful to you, and then I'll ask for some volunteers to share what you appreciate about one of the ones you starred. Make sense?

Here's the only rule. You can't speak about your own version of the gospel. I'd like for you to notice how others summarized it. Notice how they described the faith we all share. Notice

the specific images and themes they employed. Then reflect for a moment on how that helps you understand the significance of Christ and his death and resurrection for us.

I'll start by reading through all of them one time. And then I'll open it up for some thoughts and reflection.

I think it is pretty unlikely that we'll actually use these seven words and only these seven words as we share the gospel. For example, I don't think any of us would (or should!) go up to someone and say: "Deep darkness alone. Rich community in Christ." That might be a little weird. But perhaps those seven words can help you frame a conversation. Imagine, for instance, someone in your life who tends to be lonely. (We talked about that last week.) It shouldn't be hard to think of someone. As you are talking with them, you might acknowledge how hard it is to be alone, how "deep" the isolation can feel. How dark loneliness can make life seem. Then, perhaps, you'll describe the community you have found in your church as a believer in Jesus. You won't gloss over the challenges of life together, and you won't give the impression that Christians aren't also still sinful. But you'll talk about the richness of a community of forgiven sinners who love one another and support one another because they have all been loved and supported by God in Christ. Even if you don't use these words, the message you convey to this person will be, "Deep darkness alone. Rich community in Christ."

Because some of you asked, I'll share with you the one I came up with. "Christ is risen. He raises us, too." As I thought about how I would summarize the gospel, I wanted to use the death/life metaphor. John 10:10 is one of my favorite passages, where Jesus says he has come to give life and to give it abundantly. So, I wanted to talk about life—a full life now and eternal life at his return. I also wanted to ground our life in the good news of Jesus's death and resurrection—that's the heart of the gospel, after all. I also wanted to find a way to acknowledge that, even though we've been forgiven, God's not done with us. Sin still clings, and death still lurks. While Jesus's resurrection is complete, and while he has raised us from a life of guilt, the fullness of our resurrection waits for his return. So, I settled on "Christ is risen. He raises us, too."

As I read through your summaries this week, I found quite a few that I found personally meaningful. I'll keep a number of them handy. One in particular that I appreciate is "My Jesus

gives hope, light, and life.” What a great summary of the good news of Jesus. In a day and age that is filled with many reasons for despair, darkness, and death, “My Jesus gives hope, light, and life.” Thanks for that.

And maybe that’s a good one to end with. Next week we’ll celebrate the most important events in history. This would be a great way of explaining to your friends and family and neighbors the reason for Easter. *My Jesus*—I like how personal that is. He’s not just for us. He’s not just for them. He’s also *for me*. *For you*. And what does he *give* us? *Hope. Light. Life*. Such things we are all looking for. Such things we all desperately need.

My prayer for you this Holy Week is that you will see our suffering and dying and rising Savior as your Jesus. I pray that his glorious resurrection will fill you with hope. That his passion and love for you will bring light to all that is dark in your life. That he will fill you with life—new life, real life, joyful life, abundant life. And ultimately, eternal life. “My Jesus gives hope, light, and life.” In Jesus’ name, Amen.