

We have arrived.

But it's interesting, that the stories we are given this morning are about what happens after you think you have arrived, and the realization that the journey does not end at a stable and a baby. Instead, we are given a glimpse into the family life of Jesus as he grows, and it is as if the curtain on the beautiful, tranquil picture we have made of this family is pulled back, and we see it for what it really is.... a family very much like our own. The challenge we face as we move away from the Christmas story is to find ways to make it our own.

In the passage from Colossians, Paul seems to be pointing us to the goal as followers of Jesus. The verses speaks about being raised in Christ, and we are reminded what it means to be part of a people where Christ is in all.

Paul gives us a list of words that I hear very much like a challenge to our living. Because we are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, this is how we are to be:

Compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, bearing with one another, forgiving, loving, seeking peace, thankful, learning, praising....

....words that are so powerful, that if you or I were to incorporate them into our living, they would have the capacity to change us as people.

Two quick stories about the power of words...

Theodore Geisel was a writer of children's books. After a number of successful publications, Geisel's editor challenged him to write a story using no more than fifty different words.

Impossible?

Not at all.

Theodore Geisel wrote one of the most famous children's books of all times. He used his middle name as his pen name, Theodore Seuss Geisel. Here are the opening lines of his 50 word book.

I am Sam.

Sam I am.

I do not like green eggs and ham.

Green Eggs and Ham went on to become one of Dr. Seuss' most popular books. I am sure he laboured over every single one of those fifty words.

That story was told in a book about the power of words. Christian author Debbie Macomber was also challenged to pick a word. Years earlier, she had started the practice of picking one word and spending the year with it. She would pay attention when the word was dropped in conversation, when she came across it in her reading, and when she heard it in a song. The practice of choosing one word became her faith focus throughout the year. Her guidance for this practice came from a saying of Jesus, recorded in John, chapter 15. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." She discovered that God led her to moments throughout the year, when she learned more about what that word meant, but more important, about how that word was being manifested in her living. The best part of the journey was that she learned more about God.

The first year she chose the word desire, because the deepest desire in her life was to be a writer and to serve God through her writing. When a close family member died, Debbie's world was rocked, for she realized that life held no guarantees. She had been putting off following her dream because life was busy and full, and she thought there would always be a someday. Debbie realized that the someday was now. There was no money to buy a typewriter, so she rented one. Every morning after her children left for school, she would move the typewriter to the kitchen table and write until they came home. She wrote for years with only rejection letters to show for the effort. She took minimum wage night work to help the family and the pay the bills. There was never enough time. More often than not, her thoughts centered around giving up.

Finally, a contact was made, and someone took a second look at a manuscript that they had rejected earlier. They offered a year's worth of suggestions for revisions and additions. She literally rewrote the entire book. But this time, when she sent the manuscript in, it was accepted. Debbie Macomber was now a professional writer.

In subsequent years, as her career grew, she honed the practice of picking a word, tying the practice to her spiritual journey and her desire to walk closer with God. Every year she chose a different word. Her list included words like believe,

hunger, trust, brokenness, prayer, seek, balance, hope and wholeness. She would pay particular attention when these words came up in conversation. She used them as the focus for her personal devotional time. She kept a journal of all the things she learned through the year about her one particular word.

This year, I want to give you the opportunity to try the same thing. In your bulletin, we stapled in the list of qualities Paul invites us to adopt as the beloved of God. My challenge to you this year, is to pick one of those words, only one, and seek it out.

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, harmony, peace, calling, thankfulness, dwell, wisdom, gratitude.

Pay attention when you hear it in conversation. Perk up your ears when you hear it in a song or a hymn. Study it. Look up what it means. Check out the Bible for times when that particular word is used. Let it simmer away in your thoughts, as you consider how God might be inviting you to make that word real in your living this year. Offer that word in prayer. Use it as a way to know more of God and more of yourself.

I can't help but wonder how our lives and the families would be changed, if we decided to live with a bit more compassion or kindness or patience, or gratitude this year. Maybe Paul had it right... whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, and give thanks to God for all the opportunities we have to grow in our life with Christ this year.

May the one known to us as the Word be in our words, and our thoughts, and our dreams, in our speaking and our listening, as we grow together in our calling to be the people of God in our time and place. Amen.

