

Now, may I Speak in the name of God the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I've been thinking a lot about Torrey Pines recently. My son and daughter's boyfriend are in town for Easter and they're both on at me about having a round of golf up there and you can book 90 days in advance. So for the last few days I've been on the computer counting down the days, just as soon as it turns seven o'clock, I was on there booking a round, because it's not just the golf which is good at Torrey Pines. I love that state park next door. It's great to have a walk up there. And those Torrey Pine trees are magnificent. I love the way that they've been battered by the wind. You don't have to know which way the prevailing wind blows up there. Even if it's completely still, you can tell by the way that the trees, they look as if the wind's permanently blowing because they've been shaped by the prevailing wind over the years.

And shaping is a theme which links our readings this morning. And I want to ask the question, what is it that shapes us just as those Torrey Pine trees have been shaped by the wind? And I want to explore what it means to be shaped by the words of the Bible. Words can be very powerful, and their power is in their ability to shape our understanding of ourselves and the world. If I can give you a silly, small experience from my own life, it happened on a plane and my very first flight, actually. I was out 20 and I was heading off across the Atlantic to New York from London, and nobody had ever told me what turbulence was.

So halfway across the Atlantic, it was all going pretty, I was a very nervous flyer, it's all going pretty smoothly. And halfway across the Atlantic, there was a boom and the plane just dropped, as some of you might know it does. And I just thought that was it. I thought, right, that's it. We're going down here. And I must have gone a very pale color and I must have gripped the man's hand to me very tightly because he leaned over and said, don't worry, its only turbulence. And he went on to explain what turbulence was. And of course, then what was terrifying, became mildly exciting.

But the key was that he told me what that word was. He put a word to the phenomenon and made me feel less terrified of what was going on. And in a similar way, God has communicated to us through the Bible and offered an explanation of our world and our lives and given us the vocabulary to articulate and speak about our lives and our world. And that knowledge can transform our experience and our understanding as we draw on the images from the Bible and see our own lives and experience through that lens.

And what identifies us as Christian is that we draw our words, our images, our metaphors from the Bible. That's where we look to have an understanding of the world that shapes us. We aim, as Christians, to be shaped by the language and images of the Bible. There are alternatives competing for our attention. We could be shaped by fear. That's a very powerful shaping force, as we've seen in recent years. Fear can make people do very strange things. Or we could become bitter and allow ourselves to be shaped by what we are opposed to. We could define ourselves by those things which we are against.

But as Christians, we are called to be shaped primarily by the Bible and its images. That's where the power and the authority of the biblical text lies, and our readings give us a glimpse of how strong that power can be. Our gospel reading from Luke marks the starting point of Jesus' ministry. He goes straight from being tempted in the desert, to Nazareth to speak in the synagogue. He goes to the synagogue, it says, as was his custom and as a respected teacher, he's invited to read from the scriptures, and he chooses a passage from the prophet Isaiah. And then he sat down, which didn't mean he'd finished because the custom in the synagogue at the time was that whoever read the lesson would then sit down and offer a reflection. So that's why we're told, the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

There's an intensity about this scene. You can imagine, sometimes there's a power in silence and a heaviness and weight in the atmosphere. That's what was in the synagogue that day. The passage Jesus read was widely understood by the people in the synagogue as describing the coming Messiah, the one they were expecting. They'd heard about Jesus. They'd heard about his miracles. They knew he'd

been causing a stir. They're looking at him intently. And they're thinking, is this the one? Is this the long hoped for Messiah? So, there's this electric moment in the synagogue. And Jesus breaks the silence by saying, today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And everyone in the synagogue knows what Jesus meant.

Jesus was saying, I am he. I am the Messiah for whom you have been waiting. This is one of those moments as we've had in this season of Epiphany, of revelation, Jesus is revealing himself to the people in the synagogue. And Jesus and his hearers knew what to expect in the Messiah because their understanding of the Messiah was shaped by the words of the Old Testament, particularly the prophet Isaiah. Jesus understood himself and his mission in the terms of the Old Testament prophecies. That is what shaped him. He knew because of what he read in the Old Testament scriptures that he was to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

There's much more that could be said about that, but I'm going to stay with the theme of shaping and suggest that just as Jesus' understanding of himself and his ministry was shaped by the scriptures, so can ours. We get a great example of that in the epistle. We get there in 1 Corinthians, a defining image of the church, of who we are gathered here at St. James this morning. How do we define and understand ourselves as a group? Are we a club, a charity, a business, perhaps? No. We're to let the glorious image that Paul right about in One Corinthians shape our understanding of ourselves. We're not a club, a charity or a business. We are the body of Christ. That's the image that Paul is describing in that passage. And there could be no higher calling for any group of people.

In some strange, mystical way, we are bound together by God's Spirit into being the body of Christ. And as a body, we are called to carry on the mission of Jesus, whose body we are, to bring good news to the poor, release to the captive, to proclaim the good news or the year of God's favor. We're called to do that because Christ has nobody but our body, no

hands but our hands, no feet but our feet. Together, we are Christ's body in this place.

St. Paul says, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually, members of it." And just as our understanding of ourselves in community as the body can be shaped by biblical images, so our understanding of ourselves as individuals is shaped by our reading of the Bible. For instance, it makes a big difference to think of ourselves as a creature of God, as part of his creation, as fearfully and wonderfully made, rather than thinking of ourselves simply as a random collection of cells. We understand ourselves differently if we know ourselves to be an adopted child of God. And my favorite biblical image comes from St. Paul, where he calls us clay jars with treasure within. These are the images which I try and let shape me.

And let me close with a challenge. Next time you see one of those magnificent Torrey Pine trees, ask yourself, what is it that shapes me? Amen.