

**The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa**

First Sunday after Christmas

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

December 26/27, 2009

As usual my Christmas this year was filled with more blessings than I deserved. How blessed we were to have all three sons home and to be able to sit together for the late Christmas Eve liturgy. It was the first time we have worshiped together on Christmas Eve in 25 years. How blessed we were to spend the day together. We went to a movie, had dinner, played some cards and spent the day enjoying each others company.

For Christmas I received more than my share of presents---some shirts, a sweater, a gift certificate, a mug, a dvd, and of course books; lots and lots of books. I received two books about baseball, a book about Gettysburg, a book on Theology. Santa also brought each of the Fedewa guys *Born to Run*. I think one of the signs of aging is that the older we get the more we enjoy getting and giving books as presents.

My problem with getting books for Christmas is that I still have at least one book that I received last Christmas that I have not yet read. Add that book to at least a dozen books that I bought this past year that I still have not read. I can only guesstimate in fact how many dozens of books I bought in the decade just ending that I never did get around to reading. I do know that when I recently shipped a few boxes of books off to a friend so he could sell them for me online that at least a quarter of them were in perfect, like new, unopened condition. If there is ever a 12 step group for compulsive book buying, I think I need to attend. One of my resolutions for the coming year is to read every book I buy. I resolve that I will read every book I buy in 2010 before I buy another book. Yes indeed, we will see how long I keep that resolution.

All is not hopeless however. This past week I did begin reading one of the books I purchased in 2009. The book is titled *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott. I am only a few chapters into the book, but the author's point is clear. Conversation is central; it is the building block in any relationship. Too often we avoid true, authentic conversation at work and at home. Too often we fail to appreciate the power and the importance of the simple act of conversation. The foreword to the book contains the following sentence: "Our lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly one conversation at a time." While no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a business, a marriage, or a life, any single conversation can. The conversation is the relationship."

*Fierce Conversation*. The title alone is evocative. While to some, fierce might suggest something that is menacing, cruel, barbarous or threatening. In fact, the author points out that a thesaurus would list the following synonyms for the word fierce. You find: robust, intense, passionate, untamed, unbridled and eager. "In its simplest form", the author explains, "a fierce conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real".

With that sort of definition, it seems that most of our conversations are somewhat less than fierce, less than true, less than authentic. Aren't too many of our conversations pretty tame, predictable, and lacking in passion? How many truly fierce conversations do we have in a day, a week, a month? Geeze, I wonder how many truly fierce conversations I have had in my life. I probably could count them on my two hands, with a finger or two to spare.

The human history, beginning with the story of creation is a story of the fierce conversation between God and humankind. The conversation began “in the beginning” when God spoke and creation came to be. God spoke a word, "let there be light" and it was so. God called the light day, and the darkness God called night. God said “let there be water and dry land” and it was so. God said “let there be vegetation and animals and trees and fish and birds”, and it was so. God spoke and said “let there be sun and moon” and it was so. God said let there be woman and man and it was so. And God said “it is very good”. From the beginning, God has spoken a word that is fierce, a word that is robust, intense, passionate, unbridled, and true. From the beginning God has been engaged in a fierce conversation with all that God has created.

Of course, we all know that conversations require one who speaks, and those who listen. From the beginning, God has spoken, and from the beginning, humankind has chosen not to hear. The story of history is a story of the relationship collapsing because humankind refuses to listen to Word that God speaks. And yet, despite the refusal of humankind to listen, God continues to speak. God speaks through the beauty of creation. God speaks through the freeing of Israel from slavery and giving the land of promise. God speaks through the law, through the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel, Abraham, Moses, Sarah and Ruth. God speaks through the prophets who call Israel to hope and rejoice as the Lord returns to them. God speaks and humankind closes its ears refuses to listen.

Finally God speaks a Word that becomes flesh and dwells among us. The word became flesh in the person of Jesus and pitched his tent on earth. This is the wonder of the Feast of Christmas that we are celebrating. The word that God has spoken from the beginning became incarnate, became flesh and walked this earth. In the flesh we could see what God’s word looked like. Jesus is the Fierce Conversation of God Come in the Flesh. We could see God’s Fierce Conversation in the flesh as Jesus touched, and fed, as he healed, and forgave. We could see God’s Fierce Conversation in the flesh as Jesus loved and wept, and laughed and suffered and died. We could see in the flesh that the word of God was stronger than death as Jesus, God’s fierce word incarnate, rose from the grave.

We celebrate the Feast of Christmas, not only because the Word of God became flesh in the person of Jesus. We celebrate that the Word of God still dwells among us. The Spirit that God breathed in creation, the Spirit that God breathed through Israel and the Prophets, the Spirit that breathed in Jesus the Word Made Flesh has been breathed into our hearts and into our lives. We celebrate that the fierce conversation continues as God continues to speak to our world in and through God's people.

My friends, our prayer today is that we might take time to see and hear God alive and in the flesh, dwelling in our world. Our prayer is that we live a life surrounded by the mercy filled and joy filled conversation God continues to have with our world today. Our prayer is that we might be part of God’s word spoken to our world today. God’s robust conversation continues when we feed, when we clothe, when we welcome and when we embrace. God’s intense conversation continues when we forgive. God’s passionate conversation continues when we give thanks. God’s unbridled and untamed conversation continues when we strive for justice and peace. God’s fierce conversation continues when we love.

May it be so. May our eyes be open to receive, our hearts to receive, and your ears to hear God's fierce conversation, Jesus, the Word of God alive and speaking in our world today.