

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Any and every translation of the bible involves interpretation. Even for the most scholarly translators well versed in Greek and Hebrew, they must build the bridge between ancient rhetoric and context with the contemporary vernacular.

In *The Message*, a translation by pastoral theologian Eugene Peterson, he draws on his experience as a parish pastor in the attempt to translate revered scripture into a language of now. He is clear that he, in no way, is attempting to replace study bibles or more scholarly translations. He is trying to get people who haven't read the bible to read it and to get people who have read the bible to pick it up again and look at it in a new way.

The translation we use in worship is the New Revised Standard Version, the NRSV. And this morning we heard this version of Isaiah's message to his companions in exile:

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told to you from the beginning?

Isaiah asks.

And he repeats these questions the same way, a second time.

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

Peterson's version is a little different. His translation reads:

Have you not been paying attention?

Have you not been listening?

Haven't you heard these stories all your life?

Don't you know anything?

Haven't you been listening?

While worded differently, these prophetic questions evoke the same urgency and faithful sincerity. Have you not known? Don't you know anything? Isaiah is trying to remind his contemporaries that God who did great things a long time ago is still going about that greatness now.

These prodding questions aren't meant to send the Israelites or us spiraling into learned hopelessness and despair. Isaiah is kicking off his prophetic pep talk to a people who are already there. They're already in the midst of hard times. They've lost their homes. They've lost their identity in the land. No more words could make them feel any worse than they already do.

You just don't kick a dog when it's already down.

Isaiah bears words of comfort and encouragement in this text before us. He speaks of God's creativity at the beginning of all things. He reminds the people of God's endurance and God's generosity giving strength to the powerless and power to the faint. Have you not known? Isaiah asks. Haven't you been listening?

The prophet's words echo the embrace of the divine Creator, a spoken message meant to touch their shaken spirits. Isaiah speaks, using words, God's words, to heal.

When Jesus enters Simon and Andrew's home, Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. And while for us this might seem quite fixable with some aspirin, fever in that time was quite serious.

In this part of the gospel reading, the only ones who have any words are Simon and the other fishermen. They tell Jesus about the woman in bed. And even then, we don't know exactly what they say, for there aren't any quotations in this part of the pericope. And in the red-letter bibles (where everything Jesus says is printed in red), this portion would be all black print, for Jesus says nothing. He comes and takes the mother-in-law by her hand and lifts her up.

She is healed; the fever leaves her and she begins to serve. Jesus' touch is remarkable here. Because, for any good Jew, any solid rabbi in that time... they would have feared touching the weak and coming into contact with the feverish. But not Jesus. He takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and restores her to her honorable place of service with his touch that speaks volumes given the social and religious customs.

Mark's gospel continues and we hear of Jesus' healing a whole town's worth of sick and demon-possessed people. He cures many with various diseases and won't let the demons speak. He limits the demons' power by forbidding them to use words.

Jesus knows that words have power. Words have strength. Words can bring prod people from despair to hope.

When Simon and his companions tell Jesus that folks are searching for him, Jesus says they need to move on so that he can proclaim the message. Some translations will read "preach" here. Jesus wanted to keep on moving in order to keep on preaching.

Mark concludes this section telling us that Jesus continued on, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons. His was a twofold ministry in those days. He healed and he preached.

The good news, the message of hope and life, was accompanied by action. Jesus used words and he used his hands. Not necessarily because he was an animated preacher, we assume that he was. But Jesus used his hands and his words in healing people, taking them by hand, by voice to lift them up.

Have you not known?

Haven't you been listening?

The prophets like Isaiah spoke words of hope.

And Jesus, Jesus preached and he also healed.

His healings alone weren't anything extraordinary in that day. Miracle workers were traveling around just as Jesus did. But when Jesus healed, his healings were paired with his preaching, with his proclaiming good news.

Have you not known?

When Jesus took that mother-in-law's hand, it was so much more than a healing. He restored her to service.

Haven't you been listening?

The hands he used to lift up, to restore that woman were the same hands spread on the cross that all might be restored to life and to such an honorable place of service.

And they were the same hands that broke bread and spoke the words "given for you" at his last meal.

Some things might get lost in translations.

But the words of hope and life from the prophets and from Jesus,
the healings, the crucifixion and resurrection,
the call to serve in honorable ways,
these can never be lost,
as we continue to trust in God who created and creates anew,
and who comes among us in both word and tangible form at this very table.

To the glory of God.

Amen.