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John 1:1-5
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The Power of Words

We have heard it said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Sounds brave, but it’s not true. Words hurt and can have life long impacts upon us. We often don’t forget the words spoken to us.

Take our current political environment for example. Hate speech, name calling, and flat out lying, has prepared the soil from which more recent violent actions have sprung forth such as the last week’s assassination attempt against our former president.

We do reap what we sow.

It’s time to tone down the political rhetoric on both sides. We need to stop acting like playground bullies and start debating real issues with actual facts in order to find workable solutions to the many problems that our nation faces. Demanding anything less from our candidates is unAmerican and unpatriotic. So let’s start holding our elected officials accountable for the words they say and demand that they act in a character that is in keeping of the offices they hold or hope to hold.

The scripture that Lindsay selected for us today is all about rhetoric and the power of words. John in fact starts off his Gospel like a thesis statement for what the rest of the Gospel will be about. Words. Light. Life. Creation. New life. God. And Jesus Christ.

It’s quite short and poetic. So as with all good poetry, I invite you to sit back and soak it all in. Let the words wash over you and fill your hearts and minds with all sorts of beautiful imagery. John 1:1-5.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I want to talk today about the power of words and the impacts they have on us. We will look at what the bible says about the words that come from our mouths. We will see what Jesus said about our words. And then we will look at

how we are to live in a day when people say whatever they want without any repercussion or accountability.

The scripture we just heard says a lot about words, particularly God's words. We see that words are eternal, part of God, in fact indistinguishable from God. Words can be creative, life giving, enlightening, and empowering. They can also be destructive, draining, darkening, and belittling.

The wisdom writer of Proverbs provided more than a few nuggets of truth about the power of our words. To name a few, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, those who love it will eat its fruit."¹ "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness breaks the spirit."² "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."³

The wisdom writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."⁴

The Ten Commandments prohibit the misuse of our words to profane the name of God, dishonor our parents, or give false testimony against our neighbor.

The Apostle Paul in speaking to the Church in Ephesus said, "Do not let unwholesome talk come from your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."⁵

He continued, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."⁶

¹ Proverbs 18:21

² Proverbs 15:4

³ Proverbs 12:18

⁴ Ecclesiastes 5:2

⁵ Ephesians 4:29-32

⁶ Ephesians 5:1-4

To the Church in Philippi Paul said, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praise worthy - think about those things.”⁷

To the Church in Rome he said, “Bless those who persecute you; bless do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing; mourn with those who are mourning. Live in harmony with one another.”⁸

To the Church in Thessaloniki Paul said, “Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”⁹

To the Church in Colossae he said, “Let your conversations be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”¹⁰

And the Apostle James said, “If anyone considers themselves religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on their tongue, they deceive themselves and their religion is worthless.”¹¹

Jesus, who is the Word of God said, “You have heard it said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to them, ‘Raca’ [or empty headed] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”¹²

“What goes into a person’s mouth does not make them unclean, but what comes out of their mouth, is what makes them unclean.”¹³

“The good person brings good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and the evil person brings evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart, their mouth speaks.”¹⁴

The question begs then, how can we as God’s people bless others with our words?¹⁵

We can be welcoming. Hospitality makes room for one another person, right where they are at. When we welcome others, we welcome the image of God in

⁷ Philippians 4:8

⁸ Romans 12:14-16

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

¹⁰ Colossians 4:6

¹¹ James 1:26

¹² Matthew 5:21-22

¹³ Matthew 15:11

¹⁴ Luke 6:45

¹⁵ <https://www.northvalley.org/messages/sermon/2023-01-29/how-to-bless-others-with-your-words>.

which they have been created. That's why Jesus said calling someone empty headed or you fool was so bad. It defames the image of God in them.

We can show Respect. Be the person who builds up and doesn't tear them down.¹⁶ Again every human being has been created in the image of God. Showing someone love and respect and kindness respects that divine image.

Offer Mercy and Forgiveness. Offering forgiveness may be the most common way to bless someone with words.¹⁷ We are also human which means that we are imperfect and will sometimes get things wrong. Whether in what we do or say, keep short accounts of sin, ask for forgiveness and extend it as often as it has been extended to you.

We can express Compassion. The Greek word for compassion is *splagnomizai*. It means having a heart moved with compassion to such a degree that you feel it in your gut. You see another person's suffering, and you are with them in it. Remember the one "law" of Christ was to love one another.¹⁸

We can speak Honestly. Our bible verse from Vacation Bible School, Ephesians 4:15, reminds us, "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."¹⁹ We should talk about a problem, not around a problem.²⁰

We can stop Blame Shifting. When failure happens, our tendency is to hide for fear of shame or other negative consequences. Instead, let us own up to our failings and take responsibility for them.

We can Reconcile Broken Relationships. Our words can bring peace by simply saying "I'm sorry that things have gone wrong between us, but I want to find a better way to have a good relationship again." The other person might not be ready for reconciliation but this leaves the door open for future possibilities. And God never seems to be in a hurry.

We can be more careful not to judge. Jesus was very clear that we should not judge others lest we should be judged by the same standard we hold others up to.²¹

We can affirm people Expectantly. We tend to live up to what other people expect of us.²²

¹⁶ Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 2:7; Romans 12:10

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 3:13; Job 4:4; Matthew 5:7

¹⁸ Colossians 3:12; Galatians 6:2; Jude 1:22; Job 6:14

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:15

²⁰ Proverbs 24:26; Ephesians 4:15; Galatians 6:1; Proverbs 28:23; Ecclesiastes 8:6; Proverbs 27:14

²¹ Matthew 7:1-6

²² 1 Thessalonians 5:11

We can show appreciation. When others do well, we should praise them instead of keeping silent. In the same way, let us recognize another person's talents or gifts.

We can encourage others. The writer of Hebrews said, "See to it brothers and sisters that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."²³

These are just a few thoughts for us to feast on over the next couple of months leading up to November's election season.

So may we pay attention to the words we use and the word our candidates use. For the words from our mouths, come from what is stored up in our hearts. May we use them in the same creative, life giving way the Spirit of God did in those first moments of creation. And may streams of living water flow from within us onto the world around us.²⁴

Proverbs says, "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered."²⁵

²³ Hebrews 3:12-13

²⁴ John 7:37b-38

²⁵ Proverbs 11:25