

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR 12th SEPTEMBER 2021 - Rev. David Jenkins

Call to Worship - You know how Jesus would tell stories and present word-pictures of the Kingdom of God? What pictures might convey the Kingdom to us today/

What about this-The Kingdom of God is like a deep and intimate friendship between two people. Such a friendship extends so that others are brought into the same close circle. In turn each friend encourages others into the belonging and mutual care that characterises their shared life. the circle continues to extend and has no boundary.

Might our worship today play its part in the ever-expanding Kingdom of God?

Hymn 157 Singing the Faith (64 Hymns and Psalms) "God has spoken"

God has spoken -by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging Word;
each from age to age proclaiming
God the one, the righteous Lord!
In the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast,
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first and God the last.

God has spoken -by Christ Jesus,
Christ the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father, ever one:
spoken by the Word incarnate,

God from God, ere time was born;
Light from light, to Earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.

God is speaking -by his Spirit
speaking to our hearts again;
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast:
God abides, the Word unchanging,
God the first and God the last.

(George Wallace Briggs)

Prayer

In the silence, let us draw on your strength.....

In the words that we will hear, through hymns and prayers, readings and reflections, speak to us what we need to guide, challenge, reassure and motivate us into following you more closely.

Forgive our wasted, superficial words when there was a real opportunity for the meeting of minds-an opportunity we squandered.....

Help us to find the right words, the appropriate, helpful, up-building words to say when a word is looked for.

Help us to be silent when words would intrude.

You who have spoken by your prophets, through Jesus and through your Spirit speak to us afresh today to thrill us, to illuminate us, and to lead us, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All-Age Talk-"The Abandoned City" (the retelling of a traditional story by Margaret Silf in "100 Wisdom Stories")

In a land across the sea, there is an old city where no one lives. Weeds grow on the rooftops of ruined houses and the streets are overgrown with grass and nettles. But once, it was a thriving township. Long ago, hundreds of people lived here. One afternoon, a wise and holy man was walking along the main street. His eyes were full of tears. He kept his head bowed low as he made his way through the town centre and out to the open countryside. The townspeople watched him, shocked. But no one dared to

ask him the reason for his obvious distress. Then the mayor made a guess. "Someone must have died at the other side of town", he suggested. A woman took up the story. "Could it be the plague?" she asked. A young woman began to weep, as she thought of how the plague might kill her little children. In no time, the town was in uproar, quite certain that the plague had struck. There was a frantic scramble to get away from the town before the infection spread. The people loaded up their donkeys and carts, and streamed out into the countryside. Within an hour, there was not a single soul remaining in the town. Later that day, the holy man came back to his house. He couldn't begin to understand the emptiness that he discerned. After all, only a short while before, he had been happily peeling onions for his dinner, and he had gone out for a while to give his streaming eyes a little rest.

[Hymn 164 Singing the Faith \(482 Hymns and Psalms\) "Your words to me are life and health"](#)

1 Your words to me are life and health;
they fortify my soul;
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal!

2 Your words to me are light and truth;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
as in their truth I grow.

3 Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace, and grace;
from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face.

4 Your words are perfected in One,
yourself, the living Word;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord.

(George Currie Martin)

Reader One-James 3: 2-12

"All of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴ Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature,^[b] and is itself set on fire by hell.^[c] ⁷ For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters,^[d] this ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters,^[e] yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh."

Reader Two- Proverbs 2:1-15

"My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;

from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.
It will save you from the way of evil,
from those who speak perversely,
who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
those whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways."

Reader Three-Romans 10: 13-15

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Sermon "Speaking"

Some people are not able to speak at all.

Speech is a precious gift,

We look forward to hearing a baby's first words; but "dadda" and "mamma" can soon become "No" and "Shan't".

The words we use from infancy onwards can become weapons of war or building blocks of peace.

Speaking can be dangerous.

That's the conclusion we draw from James' letter. James speaks of the powerful destructive force of the tongue.

That force can show itself in gossip. I met a lady for the first time and in a space of a few minutes she had assassinated the characters of three people I know well. Her speech was extremely harmful.

The destructive force of speech can reveal itself in tactlessness. We can make wounding comments because we put the tongue into gear before engaging the brain. Do we need to be more careful regarding what we say about other people?

Possibly the most damaging form of speech is that verbal abuse which can destroy a person's confidence and self-esteem.

There are other ways (no doubt you can think of some) in which speaking can be destructive. There are words said in anger which we may bitterly regret afterwards. Imagine holding a stone in your hand.

Once you have hurled it and the stone leaves your hand you have no control over any damage it may do. Once words leave your mouth you have no control over them either.

So if speech is potentially so destructive, is it better to remain quiet?

In some ways it is. If you remain quiet, people can think you're wise, even if you're not! Silence is an essential part of listening.

But even silence can cause hurt. There is the cowardice of compliant silence when words could save a person's reputation or even their life, but silence appears to condemn them. Silence can be as tactless and hurtful as speech under some circumstances.

The Nazis were able to do terrible things to the Jews partly because not enough people spoke up in protest. Silence can do damage too.

So how can speech become constructive instead of destructive?

The Book of Proverbs speaks of the gentleness and wisdom of speech which can heal, impart knowledge and lead relationships forward.

Words of encouragement that build people up rather than words of criticism which break them down are hugely important. You may know these words - "If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn; if he lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy; if he lives with encouragement, he learns self-confidence; if he lives with praise he learns to appreciate". (Dorothy Law Nolte from "Children learn what they live")

Words have tremendous powers of communication. There is a persuasive power in words which we should never underestimate. Some of the great speeches of history have inspired hope for millions of people. Martin Luther King's speech "I have a dream" has had profound influence.

Even sermons may have their place!

Somebody said to me after one of my sermons, "Your sermon was like peace and mercy to me". I said, "Oh that's wonderful. Why was that?" And the cheeky reply was "It was like peace because it passed understanding and it was like mercy because it endured forever"! But even the much maligned sermon may have a life-transforming power beyond itself.

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Maybe it is, but a visual culture needs words, too, to bring interpretation and understanding. Sticking a child in front of the TV has its place for a limited time, but it is no substitute for actual communication, which is best conveyed by parents talking with their children.

Paul's concern, in writing to the Romans, is that people cannot arrive at faith unless they have heard the good news of God and how will they hear unless someone proclaims that good news to them?

One of the most constructive ways in which we can use speech is to share the deep things that matter most to us.

Christian witness can express itself in many ways. "Actions speak louder than words"-but what if our actions give an ambiguous message? What if our lives do not always rise to the heights of integrity?

There is still a unique value in what we can say.

A report which came to one Methodist Conference was called "Time to talk of God". It encourages us to explore the neglected art of Christian conversation, of how we can talk with one another more meaningfully about the God in whom we believe, and how such sharing can become a more natural part of our everyday talk. Do we tend to talk about everything else but God? Even among ourselves? We may well talk about the Church but not about God. Can we overcome our embarrassment and discover the excitement of such conversation?

Speech is a great gift. It is an enormous privilege to express what we feel, but this is a gift we need to use responsibly. We need to recognise its potential for destruction and to think more carefully and sensitively before we speak.

Words can cause damage, but they can also be part of the healing of that damage. As children we learned to say "Thank you", "Sorry" and "I love you". Why do we sometimes find it so hard to say these words when we are older? They have considerable power to move relationships forward.

As human beings we are developing our range of skills, our physical prowess, our mental capacity and our technological capabilities, so we also need to learn to develop the power of speech to communicate at the deepest level-all of us!

Prayers - In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard.....

We remember the hurt people's words have sometimes caused to us...

We remember with sorrow the hurt our words have caused to others...

We remember how other people's silences may have wounded us...

We remember with sorrow how our silences have failed others.....
Forgive those who have sinned against us as we ask for your forgiveness of us....
Thank you for life-giving, inspiring words which have lifted, challenged and shaped our lives....
Thank you times when words we have spoken have given encouragement, direction and hope to others.....
Guide people in positions of influence and authority when they speak-world leaders; faith leaders; politicians; journalists; programme presenters; script writers; news editors.....
Help us to speak truth-to power, to one another and to ourselves..
Help us to listen, so that we speak "in living echoes" of your voice,
through Jesus Christ the Living Word, Amen.

[Hymn 404 Singing the Faith \(315 Hymns and Psalms\) "God's Spirit is in my heart"](#)

God's Spirit is in my heart,
He has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do.

He sent me to give the Good News to the poor,
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
Tell blind people that they can see,
And set the downtrodden free
And go tell everyone the news that the Kingdom of God has come,
And go tell everyone the news that the Kingdom of God has come.

Just as the Father sent me,
So I'm sending you out to be
My witnesses throughout the world,
The whole of the world.

Don't carry a load in your pack;
You don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep -
can earn their own keep.

Don't worry what you have to say,
Don't worry because on that day
God's Spirit will speak in your heart,
Will speak in your heart.

(Alan T. Dale Verse 1; Hubert Richards Verses 2-4))

Benediction -

Word of life, who has spoken to us in this service,
Continue to speak to us
As we reflect on this act of worship,
And guide us in our speaking, our body language,
Our silences, and our listening. Amen