

## Words to Us

### INTRODUCTION:

Oh the power of a word! Words can give life or take it away, and I imagine each of us have specific memories of words spoken by a parent, a sibling, a boss, a friend or a teacher that we will never forget. Some of those memories we cherish while others haunt us.

As has been said, “Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs.”

We are wise if and when we are careful with our words.

What makes words so powerful is that they reveal the heart and soul of the one speaking.

As Jesus said in Matthew 12:33, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

And just as that is true of people so it is true of God. As we listen to consider God’s words, we see God’s heart.

This advent season we have considered God’s words to Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds and the Magi, and we have caught meaningful glimpses of God’s heart.

Today let’s consider not just God’s words to us but The Word incarnate, God’s Son, Jesus the Christ.

The “other” Christmas story talks about “The Word.”

**John 1:1-14** says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus, “The Word,” did speak and his words both expose God’s heart and give us life.

Here are four things “The Word” has said to us that we need to remember as we celebrate his birth.

### **1. I came to save you, not to condemn you**

When I was in grad school I worked on the grounds crew for the school. One Friday afternoon I was walking with my co-worker across campus back to our shed to finish up for the day. Unexpectedly, we heard a strange, distressing sound in some trees to our left. We investigated and found an owl that had been injured. Our first thought was, “How can we help?” and yet when we approached the owl with the intention of helping it the owl became incredibly agitated. It was terrified of what we were going to do and wanted nothing to do with us! I have never since seen a look of sheer terror like I saw in that owl’s eyes.

Sometimes, an offer of help can be misunderstood as a threat!

I fear that at times we are like the owl...wounded by our sins and regrets, terrified of the One approaching, not able to understand his intentions and so we at best are ambivalent about him as he approaches.

And that is one reason why one of the most important verses in the Bible is the one right after one of its most popular verses.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” That is WHAT God did.

John 3:17 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” That is WHY God did it.

God is not a cosmic kill-joy ticked off at his creation and looking for revenge. The sobering truth of Christmas is that we each deserve almighty God’s condemnation but the thrilling news of Christmas is that he has chosen to respond to our sin with salvation, not condemnation!

As a result we can respond with love and joy instead of fear and trembling as God approaches our lives.

And, as a result of the grace we have received we can approach others who do not yet know Jesus with a similar love and the goal of salvation, not condemnation. It is the Holy Spirit’s job to convict people of their sin and need for forgiveness, not ours. And when we interact with people in a respectful, loving manner we just might surprise them into becoming curious about why we are “religious” and yet still

“loving.”

Here is the rest of the owl’s story. We took the owl to the U., they discovered one of its wings had been damaged by a bullet. They fixed the wound, provided care for a few weeks and then released it to live a new life. They told us if we had not intervened the owl would have soon died.

Jesus intervened so that we too can live and never die.

## **2. I came to give you peace**

Luke tells us that the night Jesus was born a “great company of the heavenly host” appeared with an angel and they praised God saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

A common expressed thought today is that religion is an inevitable source of conflict instead of peace. And, we do see too many situations where religion has been a motivating factor in conflict.

But Christmas is not about the establishment of a religion. It is about the birth of a child that Isaiah called the “Prince of Peace.”

The peace made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has three facets;

First, and most importantly, the apostle Paul says in Romans 5:1, “Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As soon as Adam and Eve sinned their peace with God was broken and people struggle to this day, trying to figure out how to make peace with the God against whom they have sinned. The bad news is that we can’t do it. The good news is that God can!

Second, in Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia he tells us that one aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is he gives us peace. He even says in Philippians that we can present our requests and concerns to God in prayer, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Finally, Paul tells us we can enjoy peace with others. In Ephesians 2:14, Paul tells us that, “Jesus himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” In verses 15b - 18 Paul also says that, “His (Jesus’) purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making

peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

Those who first read these words must have been stunned. For in the time of Jesus and then Paul enmity, not peace, was the norm. Jews despised Gentiles. Jews could not help Gentiles give birth because that was bringing another Gentile into the world. If a Jew married a Gentile a funeral was held for the Jew. Jews spoke of Gentiles as “fuel for the fires of hell.” Needless to say, there weren’t a lot of hugs being given between Jews and Gentiles.

And Paul had been a very good Jew!! And then he miraculously met Jesus. And then he later wrote, while speaking of Jews and Gentiles, “Jesus himself is our peace.”

Are you “at war” with a certain individual or group? Have you tried to make peace and been frustrated by how difficult it can be?

True peace always starts with Jesus.

### **3. I came to heal you.**

In Matthew 9:1- 8 we are told of an incident that has become famous as a great illustration of faith and friendship.

“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, ‘This fellow is blaspheming!’ Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....’ Then he said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.”

We each live our lives with a need for healing. First of course is our need for spiritual healing through the forgiveness that God offers those who place their trust in Jesus. And secondly, we often find ourselves facing the pain and challenge of physical and relational illness and need the healing touch of God.

“Incarnation” is a Christmas day word. It is the word Christians use to speak of God “taking on flesh” in the person of Jesus. It means he identified with us, came to live with us, can identify with us, knows us...he truly can say, “I understand.”

“Incarn” is a word not used much anymore but it was once used medically and it referred to “the recovery of wounded flesh due to the presence of new flesh.” That is exactly what Jesus accomplished by being incarnated in human flesh. He brought sight to those who were blind, he healed the lame so they could walk again, he healed the deaf so they could hear again and he even raised the dead to live again.

Most importantly he conquered death and sin through the gift of his body so that we might live and love eternally!

#### **4. I came to give you a gift that is meant to be given again.**

It might not exactly fit the spirit of Christmas to say this, but Christmas is a time when a lot of people get annoyed. It may be that relative you only see at Christmas and you are reminded that once a year is enough. It may be the crowds at the stores or the never ending ads and sales. It may be the expectations that kick into gear especially at this time of year or..... it may be the wonderful practice of “regifting.”!

I am not going to ask you to admit that you are a regifter. I bet some of you have done it, though!! Last Christmas you received that one gift that made your stomach churn and for twelve months you have thought about who you might be able to give it to this Christmas. You gave it last night or will pass on the blessing later today, and you are so glad to get that wonderful item out of your sight!! You can ask God to forgive you right now if you need to do so!

Before we go any further let me just say, regifting is not always so bad....my aunt gave me a gift she was once given. She did not have a great need for it but thought I might like it. It was a brand new baseball autographed by Joe DiMaggio. It had my aunt’s name on it, not mine, but still that was a pretty special gift for a young, baseball-crazy boy to receive.

It can be scary or fun to be “regifed”. It all depends on the gift, doesn’t it?!

Webster’s New Millennium dictionary says that to regift is, “to give an unwanted gift to someone else” (bad gift, like dress socks!) or “to give as a gift something previously received as a gift.” (could be a very good gift, like the good news that God loves you and wants to give you forgiveness, peace and eternal life).

#### **CONCLUSION:**

God sent his Son, the Word, and we celebrate that today.

We also celebrate what the Word has told us.

- He came to save us, not condemn us
- He came to give us peace
- He came to heal us
- He came to give us a gift that is so special it simply needs to be regifted

Why so many good and perfect gifts?

He loves us!!

1 Corinthians 13 is commonly referred to as the “Love Chapter.” The last verse of that chapter says, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

For the longest time I wondered how Paul could isolate love as the greatest of these three. After all, everybody, everyday lives by faith. We have certain degrees of faith in objects, in organizations, in people, and guidelines and, for many, faith in God.

In a similar way, everybody, everyday needs hope. Life gets so difficult sometimes, and for many, especially, at times like today. We get battered by life, we wonder if we can keep going and we cling to hope, in people, in our own efforts, in organizations, in medicine, in money, and for many, in God.

So why is love the greatest? A friend one day helped me understand, and I would like to regift his words for you.

One day, even greater than the day Jesus was born, Jesus will return. And for each person who has placed her faith and hope in Jesus everything will change. These perishable bodies will be replaced by imperishable bodies. Sin and brokenness and regret and fear will disappear. And so will the need for faith and hope. We will no longer need faith in one who has been unseen. We will no longer need hope in the promises of God.

And love? It will finally be realized in all of its fullness, and it will never end! We will be wrapped in Love’s powerful embrace and, in many ways, there will be no more need for words.