

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Your Words | Luke 6:45**

We have a saying here, on the staff, that words matter. There are so many things being said by us on TV, on social media. So many different things being said that we've been taught, frankly, that content is important, but how you say it is huge, because words matter.

The words we use and the way they are said, matters. It shouldn't surprise us, those of us who believe that the world came into existence through a word. The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then the word became flesh and dwelt among us." [John 1:1, John 1:14] Ever since then, whether we can see it or just hear it, words matter. Your words, what you say to each other, matter.

Probably a couple hundred of us are gone this weekend because it's Martin Luther King weekend. People scatter, and it's a reminder that there are times where all you have are words. The other side has the guns, and you have the images. The other side has the power, and you have the speeches. The other side has all of the notoriety, and you have words, but words matter.

Dr. King showed me that words matter. He said, "Only in the darkness, only in the darkness can you see the stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that." Dr. King taught me a long time ago. He said, "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power, so we have guided missiles and misguided people." I love that. Real power. Dr. King also said, "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You only need a heart filled with grace and a soul powered by love to serve." One of my favorite quotes by Dr. King is in D.C. It says, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Words. Words matter. We should not honor Dr. King's time here with just words. It should spur us on because words not only matter, they shape things, and like Dr. King, I have a dream. Words matter.

That said, words can seduce as well as inspire. They can lie as well as bring truth. They can destroy as well as build up. Sometimes words in your house, in your work, in your car go the wrong way—maybe especially in your car. Let me give you a visible example. This is a card Laura was sending to a friend. It's about words and the power of words. Look at it carefully. The dinosaur says, "Are you sure he said come to the park?" What really happened to the dinosaurs? Some of you are a little slow, but it's Sunday. It'll come, it'll come. Can I just tell you one of these that shows me that words matter, and this is really . . . this comes under the heading "You cannot make this stuff up." Really,

you cannot make this stuff up. Yesterday, busy weekend, I'm coming to church late to work on this sermon. I get to a corner, and I . . . you know, you don't totally stop, but I pause, and a car goes right in front of me, and I'm just like . . . And the person in their car sees me and they raise their hands as well. And so I come here and I start working on the sermon, and I get an email about half hour, forty-five minutes later. And the email says this: "Hi, John. I think I just cut you off at Valley View and Wooddale. I thought I got to the stop sign first. I was going straight so I went. I'm sorry. I sure hope this won't turn up in a sermon anytime soon! Thank you for your understanding." Well, good news, bad news, the name did not pop up on my iPhone. All I got was 612-123-4567, so trust me, your secret's safe with me. It will stay between us!

Words matter. Other people's words, your words—it matters. It changes the world. I'd like to have us turn our attention to the words from God—God's words, God's word. And let's use the same example that Kathleen tried to teach the kids. In Luke 6 Jesus said,

41 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own? 42 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye and you'll see clearly to remove the spec from your brother's eye. 43 No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by their fruit. People don't pick figs from thorn bushes. They don't get grapes from briars. 45 A good person brings good out of the good stored up in their heart, an evil person brings evil out of the evil stored up in their heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." [Luke 6:41-45]

"The mouth speaks what the heart is full of." This is sort of a take-off on that. Some people say, "You are what you eat." Well, I think you are what you speak. You are what you eat, it's a . . . I've got to tell you, that's a terrifying concept, isn't it? If you are what you eat, what would you look like? If you are what you eat, this is what my wife would look like. She eats so much green stuff. She eats all the right things. She exercises. You are what you eat. This is what she looks like. If you want to know what I would look like if you are what you eat, I would look like this. I would be a walking Cheeto! As a matter of fact, the only resemblance between Katy Perry and me is that we both are Cheetos on the inside. Out of the fullness of the heart, you are what you speak.

We said last week we didn't want to have this just be Sunday mornings, so we asked you to fill out a little survey with that text, and over 750 of you responded. One of the questions on the survey was about today--about what you say, your mouth, your words. The question was this: Which phrase do you wish that you spoke more freely? One hundred thirty of you said, "I wish I could say more easily 'I love you'." Sixty-nine said, "I'm sorry." Sixty-two said, "I forgive you." And one hundred seven people said, "That hurt me" is hard for them to say. It's hard for many of you to say when you get hurt.

There's another category—and two hundred twenty-three people, the biggest, said "I need help" was the hardest thing to say. There were obviously two hundred twenty-

three men who took this survey. Seventy-three of you said it's hard for you to say "No". Fifty-seven of you, very few of you, said, "It's easy for me to say thank you." It's easy for most of you to say "I don't know". Only 41 of you said "I don't know" is hard for you to say, and this is what we call a statistical anomaly. It's another way to say that you're lying. It is hard for most people to struggle and say, "I don't know", especially guys.

What was striking to me was that nobody wrote in the words "I was wrong". I think that's the hardest thing to say, "I was wrong". In my house, we have a joke, where we're arguing about something and the person who finds out that the other person is right, has to go up to them and say, "Honey, you were right. And more important, I was . . . I was . . ." And then you hope that they go onto something else.

I had a . . . You know, we're from Minnesota. I had a vigorous discussion. I had an intense conversation. One of my best friends and I had a knock-down, drag out fight. About two hours into the fight, he leans across the table and his face is red and he says, "You know what? You've been doing this a long time and I've been with you the whole way, and I got to tell you, that while you are a good leader, you have these big blind spots, and you keep getting tripped up by them. You have these blind spots, John. " And on the inside, I'm thinking, "I've got blind spots? You want to talk about blind spots?" And a month later, I am still thinking about what he said because he loves me and he knows me, and I need to be reminded periodically and uncomfortably that I do have blind spots.

That's exactly what Jesus is saying in this passage. Look at the image of what Jesus is saying in this passage from the Gospel of Luke. It really could be translated: "Dude, you have a speck in your eye." The only reason I can see the speck is because I'm blind, and I am blinded by the blind spots in my life.

We are blinded to our own sinfulness, and it never, ever shows more than in the way that we talk to other people. The way we almost always not only say what we think, we justify what we think. Work with me. This never happens to you, I'm sure. You're in the middle of an argument. You say something. As the words are going from your mouth to their lips, you're going, "Aw, can I take it back?" Too late. And so do you stop everything? "I'm so sorry. Let's just stop right there. Let's pick this up later. I'm so sorry I said that." Heck no. You double down, and the volume gets louder and the truth turns into your opinion; your opinion turns into exaggeration; exaggeration turns it into rationalization; rationalization turns into a lie that you are telling, because by now it's more important to win the argument.

That's what Jesus is saying here. Think about your conversations throughout the day. One of the problems Jesus talks about is that people will say anything to win the argument. One of the other arguments Jesus uses in other places is that you're a hypocrite. You know that you're doing this and you're blaming others for doing the same thing.

How important is this? Out of the seven weeks, this may be the most important week, and I promise I won't say that two weeks from now. This may be the most important week. This may be the most important week, because your mouth is both a thermometer—it shows what the inner temperature is really like—and it's a thermostat—you can actually change things that come out of your mouth.

Charles Martin, an author that many of us love, says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but if you want to break somebody's heart, use words." That's where we are. Last week we talked about the theologian Dallas Willard, and in one of Dallas' books, he talks about the most important words in the Bible. He says this: "There are two great words in the Bible that describe the posture of our souls toward other people. One of those words is to bless. When you wish somebody well, you bless them. The other is to curse." Remember, Dallas said, "We are creatures. We are eternal creatures in a wondrous universe" he said, "but we are creatures with choices, and in every encounter with other people we choose what is good for them, or we fail to do so." We bless them, or we curse them. Blessing and cursing are simply the two ways we treat people, and cursing is not blankety-blank damn you; it is the failure to bless when you could. You are either blessing or cursing. It's important, really important stuff. I have to tell you, the temptation here is for you to polish the outside of the jar and say, "Okay, I'm going to clean up my language. Okay, okay, I'm going to work on that, I'll get better on that." I have to tell you, that's not going to work. What Jesus is saying is that it comes out of the inside, out of the heart. What we need to do is force feed love and grace and truth into the heart and let it leak out through the broken places with our mouths. So, I'd like to see how could we do that today? And what I'm going to do is give you a mouth check-up.

First-hand experience for me. Two times in the last five years, last month, right before Christmas, something goes wrong in my mouth. A filling fell out—hole in my mouth. I go in for a check-up. The doctor says, "Yep, that's got to come out." I said, "Can I have a second opinion?" The week before Christmas, yanked it right out, but I had a mouth check-up. You need a mouth check-up. Maybe you don't. Maybe you don't need a mouth check-up. How many of you have said one thing wrong since the first of the year? Okay, yeah, maybe you need a check-up, too. So, here's what we're going to do. I'm going to give you a ten-question check-up. Seven of them . . . I'm just going to read seven. I'll just stop for three of them, but then I'm going to suggest that everybody who did not raise their hand just walk out the door. You're fine.

If you raised your hand, maybe you should take this sheet with you. Take the test. If you are actually serious about it, maybe you should write down a word and then talk about it with somebody who knows you. So, let's run through it.

Mouth check-up number one: When people say that they know you, would people say that you talk too much, or that you hold too much inside? This is different than are you the talker or are you the quiet one? Some of you are the talk-talk-talker and some of you are not only quiet, but you are reserved so that people cannot get to know you because you won't let them get to know you. Which one are you?

Number two: What's harder for you: to receive criticism—never fun for anybody—or to give criticism? It's hard to tell somebody that you have these blind spots. That was hard for him to say. Which is harder for you, receiving criticism or offering it? And if somebody just poked you, you know which one is easier for them. I'm just saying.

Number three is the first one we're going to stop at. Are you more about questions or are you about answers? Matt Norman was in the last service. Matt does a blog, and he wrote recently that the holiday season brings all of these parties. He says, "Parties are usually boring for me. How many times can you talk about how bad the Vikings are?" And he says, "So, I realized that the quality of my conversations will be directly proportionate to the quality of my questions. The quality of my conversation is related to the quality of my questions—not what I say, but what I ask." If you want to turn a party around, ask better questions.

Laura and I have observed that small minds talk about other people; normal minds talk about things that happen around us; growing minds, alive minds talk about ideas that change the heart. As you think about the parties, are you asking questions about other people? Are you telling people about events? Do you ever get to the ideas that change the heart?

Number four: When was the last time that you misrepresented or exaggerated or deceived or lied to somebody in order to win? Easy question. For me, the answer was: not in months.

Number five: Sometimes we confuse swearing with bad language. They are not the same thing. Swearing is not good. I have friends who can't get through an f-ing sentence without saying the F bomb at least three or four times. That's not the same thing as bad language. Some of you have not sworn since high school, but you use bad language constantly. You gossip, or you're petty, or you tell only those parts of the conversation that made you look good, or you angrily talk, or you are self-centered. There are people who swear, and there are people who use bad language. Which one is more of a temptation for you? Are you guys having as much fun as I am? This is great! Second half of the test.

Number six: What do your words reveal about your faith? Now, this is just a little bigger than it seems, because for some of you, words revealing your faith is an easy one. Your faith is a state secret, known only to God. You're not talking about it. You're not telling anybody. You'd be embarrassed about it. I completely understand that, but that's not what this is really just about. Some of you, people wouldn't know that you're a Christian because you never talk about it. But others of you, you do. You go to Bible study, you go to church, you pray at the restaurant, you use Jesus' name other than a swear word. You would have been seen as a Christian, but are your words backing that up?

One of our good friends said . . . not any of you. I'm saying it only because he came and sat for four weeks at that part of the balcony, and then came down and talked to me and

he said, “I’m a doctor, grew up in a Christian home, but I’ve got to be a better man. I was in surgery the other day and as I left, I went around the corner and I heard one of the nurses say, ‘I will never work with him again. He yelled at me so much.’” And I realized I hadn’t used bad language, but I had made that woman feel stupid. And he said to me, “Help me become a better man.” What do your words reveal about your faith?

John Ortberg talks about this. John tells the story of a policeman on the side of the road watching the traffic. He sees two cars zooming by and looks at them. The one behind has a woman in the car and she is yelling and honking the horn and trying to cut the other person off. The other person is just trying to get away. The cop follows them into traffic, gets behind the woman who’s dodging and weaving and yelling and screaming, and pulls her over. The other car just keeps on going. And before he gets to her, she is screaming, “How could you let him go? Did you see what he did? Can you believe that he would do blankety-blankety-blankety,” yelling and screaming. “Calm down, calm down,” he says. She wasn’t calming down. He ends up taking her to the station and putting her in a room, and about a half hour later, he comes back with her driver’s license and the title to her car, and said, “These match up.” “Why did you arrest ME and not that other person? Da, da, da.” Started going again, and the guy said, “Well, you know, I watched you both, but I looked at the back of your car and saw this fish sign and a cross sign, and the “If this car is empty Jesus is taking me to heaven” bumper sticker, and “Save the whales”, and I figured you must’ve stolen the car. Lady, come on! You’re going to drive home differently, aren’t you?”

Number seven: When was the last time you resolved . . . This is a good one. When was the last time you resolved a conflict with words, and the relationship grew stronger? My argument with my friend from last month, we’re not through it, but our relationship is stronger because we’re having it. How about you?

Number eight: For people that know you, would they say—which is more true of you—grace is more important than truth, or is truth more important than grace? Because there are both kinds of people, right? There are the people who said, “Hey, I just tell the truth. If they can’t handle the truth, they just need to clear out their ears. I tell the truth.” And there are other people for whom it’s all about grace. They want us to love one another, and they’ll do anything to help us love one another. If you jump up and down on their foot they’re not going to say anything because they want to be filled with grace. Which one are you? Do you avoid conflict, or do you frankly sort of relish it because it gives you a chance to be true?

Number nine: Last one where I’ll stop. In a typical conversation, do you walk away feeling like the other person learned more about you, or you learned more about them? Typically, in conversation, did they learn more about you, or do you learn more about them? It’s that, “Oh, that’s enough of me talking about myself. You talk about me for a while.” You know? We know those people. Some of us are those people, but we don’t know it.

I have this great story from the 19th century of Great Britain, the height of the British Empire. Two prime ministers battle back and forth, each taking each other's place: William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. William Gladstone is this guy—brilliant. Even his enemies said they could never win an argument because he was brilliant. And over the course of time, he was the current prime minister, and a wealthy woman went to dinner and was seated next to Gladstone on Tuesday night. The next night, she was escorted to another dinner and was seated next to Benjamin Disraeli, who was out of government at the time but would come back and become prime minister again. And her friends on Thursday said, "Oh, what was it like? What was it like?" She said, "Well, when I was with Prime Minister Gladstone it was an incredible experience. We sat there and I learned more about the world and history and the British Empire and politics, and what we should do and what we should not do. I came away believing that William Gladstone is the smartest man in the British Empire. And the next night I was with former Prime Minister Disraeli, and I came away from that dinner convinced that I was the smartest person in the British Empire. I know who the smartest person is and I know who I'm voting for." What about you? People walk away thinking you're pretty smart? People walk away feeling like you care about them and you know their life?

Number ten: Last one. Who are the last two people that you affirmed or blessed? Who are the last two people that you affirmed or you blessed, and would they remember it? Would they remember that it was a significant enough stop in the conversation that you did?

Okay, so those are the ten questions. You can tear them up and never think about them again. If you never struggle, if you didn't raise your hand, just go home. Have a good time. But if you were serious about this desire to be a different person this year, then you should use the text and do My Words. You should wait for Beyond the Weekend and we will send you these questions. You should take one from the ushers, you should take these, and you should fill them out and ask, "What is the state of my heart, because the state of my heart is going to come out in the state of my mouth."

It's a lot more about the light that goes into the heart than the garbage that comes out. Last week, we talked about the mind that way, right? You want to have a different 2017?

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, if anything is lovely or admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, if you think about those things instead of the things you worry about, then the God of peace will be with you."
[paraphrase of Philippians 4:8-9]

This week, what are you filling your heart with that will affect your mouth? How do you bless somebody? It's very easy. How do bless somebody? You affirm them. "I see this in you. You tell the truth when it's not hard. I trust you with this." You ask them questions to show them that you respect them, and you see that they're there. You talk about forgiveness. You either ask for forgiveness—"I was wrong, I was that word"—or you offer forgiveness or you pray for them. If you want to bless somebody, ask them how to pray for them, or just pray for them, and your mouth will bear good fruit.

This sermon is not as tight as it should be because one of my best friends died. Jim died Friday night and it was unexpected. And I thought about words and the words that we had spoken, and I thought that the worst word in the world is not the bad word, or the smart-aleck word. The worst word in the world is the unspoken word, the words you did not say. I believe that the spirit of Jesus Christ is in your heart and He is saying to you, "What is the not yet spoken word of blessing that you should give, and to whom should you give it before your eyes close?"

Lord Jesus, thank You that when You spoke it was the truth, and when You spoke it was love, and when You spoke it was grace, but when You spoke it was life. I pray that these words will be received by humble hearts, humble enough to say, "Oh, God, help my mouth," and find that they really are asking You, God, to fill our hearts. Fill our hearts, that that may fill our mouths. May the love of God the Father who made you fill your heart with love to speak to others. May the grace of God the Son who forgave you and washed it clean give you grace to share with other people, grace and not judgement. May the peace of the Holy Spirit fill your hearts with peace so that you may bless those you see. All God's children said the word, Amen. Go in peace.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.