

# The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

---

## The awesome power of words

Have you ever felt the power of words? Have you ever read a poem that moved you to tears? Have you ever been captured by the words of someone who loves you deeply and who told you so? Have you ever been in a team when the coach is urging you to greater effort or a different tactic? Have you ever been in an argument full of passion and opposing opinions? Have you ever been persuaded by an advert? Have you ever been mesmerised by the presentation of a highly motivated salesman who is determined you need what he has? Have you ever been pierced by the words of a song that has touched your heart? Have you heard urgency of a parent as they cry out looking for a lost child? Some people have understood the power of words; the inflaming power of Hitler's oratory; the power vision of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech. Some of us have been deeply hurt by the power of words .. Haven'twe? Some of us know what it's like to be crushed by the words of another.. Don'twe? Some of us have spend much of our lives listening to words, which to a great extent have made us who we are, and some of us are having to work very hard to undo the effect that the words of others have had on us.

Words can be devastating. Do you remember the first time you were lied to? Maybe we know what it's like to face the truth that someone we love has lied to us. Maybe we know what it's like to experience the pain of a broken promise, or the pain of keeping your promise when someone you love did not. Maybe some of us know what it's like to have our reputation damaged by the words of another, by lies told about us.

Some of us, though, know what it's like to be built up by words; some of us are the people we are today precisely because people have spoken into our lives in significant ways. That would be true for me; in a couple of weeks we will go to Exeter to some friends that we know from the beach mission at Nefyn. Tony and Joan are former leaders of the mission and still go every year. Nearly twenty years ago, I was asked for the first time to talk at one of the Sunday evening services at the beach mission this was the first time I'd ever done a talk to adults in this way. I'd done loads of children's talks, but never a proper sermon. I spoke on John 5 – the healing of the man at the pool. Two days after (on the Tuesday) I was talking to Joan on the beach, now Joan has a doctorate in theology and has written a commentary on Luke's gospel, I didn't know that at the time – for which I am very grateful – in the course of the conversation Joan said "Sunday was very good, you obviously do a lot of talks!" to which I replied "No – actually that's the first time I've ever done that." "Well" she said "You should, because whatever it is – you've got it!" Those were extraordinarily powerful words for me, when I came back from Nefyn I spoke to Steve telling him what Joan had said and asked to do some preaching. The

rest – as they say – is history! Six words that built me up and changed my life ‘Whatever it is – you’ve got it!’

Proverbs 19 v 21 ‘The tongue has the power of life and death and those who love it will eat its fruit.’ The tongue has the power of life and death ... The tongue has the power to give life – to build up, to strengthen, to encourage, to support, to inspire but it also has the power of death – to crush and destroy, to tear down and belittle, to rob hope.

I’ve been reading this book ‘Living below with the Saints we know’ and on page 16 is this story; A man went to a Rabbi with a question, “Rabbi” he said “I understand why God commands us not to kill or steal, but I do not understand why we should not tell lies against our neighbour” The Rabbi replied “There is an answer and I will give it to you, but first I want you to get some feathers and place one on the doorstep of each house in the village, when you have done it come back and I’ll give you the answer.” So the man did what the Rabbi asked and returned to him to get the answer “Now Rabbi – what is the answer to my question?” “Ah” said the Rabbi “there is one more thing I want you to do before I give you the answer, go back and pick up all the feathers!” “I cannot do that” replied the man “it would be impossible – they’ll have blown away by now!” That’s what it’s like to tell lies against our neighbours they are life feathers – we can never retrieve them.

Speech is our most powerful faculty and our words more than anything shape and form our relationships. Ordinary words can have extraordinary power. God spoke ... and it was so! Words either enhance or destroy relationships and we cannot have meaningful relationships without words. Words are never neutral, all words have significance. There are many examples in the Bible of relationships where words were either helpful or unhelpful. The words of agreement in Genesis 13, between Abraham and Lot as they separated. The words of deceit of Rebekah and Jacob as they conspired to steal the birthright from Esau before Isaac. The words of cunning in Judges 16, as Delilah seeks to discover the source of Sampson’s strength. The words of compassion and forgiveness in Genesis 45, when Joseph finally tells his brothers who he is – and that they need not be afraid of him. The words of love between Naomi and her daughter-in-law as she bids farewell to Moab and returns to Israel. The words of friendship and loyalty between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20. The words of confrontation in 2 Samuel 12 when Nathan challenges David after his affair with Bathsheba. The words of treachery from Absalom towards his father David in 2 Samuel 15. The threatening words of Jezebel to Elijah that caused him to flee for his life in 1 Kings 19. The words of encouragement and inspiration from Nehemiah that led the people of Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The empty words of Job’s friends as they tried to explain what was happening to him. The tongue has the power of life and death ... the words of betrayal by Peter. The words of reinstatement by Jesus...

What kind of words build community and what kind destroys it? Ephesians 4 v 29 ‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’ We must, friends, take responsibility for our words – because they are so powerful. Imagine a community where we all did that, and only spoke words that benefitted those who listened. Friends, we will never have an accurate account of something second hand – much less third or fourth hand. How many relationships are spoiled because, statements which are in truth several steps removed from

their source, are taken at face value? We need to be careful of speaking when our emotions are highly charged. Friends there are always two sides to the same story. John Adlington told me something that I think is very wise, he will never try to sort out a disagreement until he has heard both sides of the story! One way we might benefit community is actually to talk less! What a challenge for some of us! Proverbs 10 v 19 “When words are many, sin is not absent; but the wise hold their tongues.” The more we talk the more we sin! The less I talk – the less I exaggerate, the less I talk – the less I am going to share gossip, the less I talk – the less I say things I regret. The less I talk – the fewer promises I make that I can’t keep. Friends we have a choice. Proverbs 18 v 21 “The tongue has the power of life and death.” Which will it be?

Ordinary words can have extraordinary power we can take our ordinary words and use them carelessly, lightly and without regard for others and we can destroy community. OR .. we can take our ordinary words and use them carefully, with thought and compassion and with great thoughtfulness towards others, and we can build a vibrant, life giving community. One that gives life not only to those already here, but one that is so extraordinary that people who come into it are transformed by the power of our words and then by the power of the word of God. Our ordinary words – used to build an extraordinary community.

As I close you will see on the screen some of the Proverbs from the Bible. I encourage you to pick one that is relevant to you – take it away – meditate on it and ask God to help you put it into practice.

Proverbs and Living below with the saints we know Pg 173/174

10:14 A wise person holds their tongue. Only a fool blurts out everything they know.

11:13 A gossip goes round spreading rumours, while a trustworthy person tries to quiet them.

12:13-15 Lies will get a person into trouble, honesty is its own defence. Telling the truth gives a person great satisfaction. A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise person listens to others.

12:18 Some people like to make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise soothe and heal.

12:25 Anxious hearts are very heavy but a word of encouragement does wonders!

13:1 A wise youth accepts his father’s rebuke.

13:3 Self control means controlling the tongue! A quick retort can ruin everything.

15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words cause quarrels.

15:4 Gentle words cause life and health; griping brings discouragement.

16:24 Kind words are like honey – enjoyable and healthful.

18:8 What dainty morsels rumours are. They are eaten with great relish.

19:20 Get all the advice you can and be wise the rest of your life.

28:13 A person who refuses to admit their mistakes can never be successful. But if they confess and forsake them, they get another chance.

28:23 In the end, people appreciate frankness more than flattery.

29:1 The person who is often reproved but refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken and never have another chance.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2007