

## **“The Currency of Words”** **Romans 9:30-10:21**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. (Gen 1:1) He took stardust in his hands and fashioned the planets. God took dirt from the ground and shaped the mountain and grabbed water from the skies and poured it into craters to form the oceans and took his finger to draw the river and the lakes. It’s a beautiful image from, I am sure, an ancient peoples somewhere, but it is not “our” story. This is not how “The” Biblical account begins. No, the creation narrative begins with silence broken by a **word**. Not just a sound but a word. As Audrey West writes, “Whether we ponder them in our hearts or speak them for others to hear, publish them online or in texts to friends, scribble them onto shopping lists or adorn them with artistic flair, most of us operate with the currency of words” and apparently so does God.

So maybe it should not surprise us that perhaps the darkest part of our story was not an act of betrayal in the Garden by Adam and Eve, the willful disobedience of God’s people on Sinai or even the turning away by many of the disciples as Jesus hung on a cross but the time when no words were spoken – years of silence when God did not speak. For approximately 400 years God chose to remain silent. Between the Book of Malachi (the last book in the Old Testament) and the first murmurings of the New Testament God was mute. Biblical Scholars call this time not simply the “Intertestamental Period” but the “Silent Years” where God intentionally did not speak. There were no words – no Canonical Words written for us, that is until “The Word” arrived on the scene.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:1,14) When God arrived on the scene as one of us He came not simply as a human being but a word, The Word – the speaking, breathing living Word of God. So “whether we ponder them in our hearts or speak them for others to hear, publish them online or in texts to friends, scribble them onto shopping lists or adorn them with artistic flair, most of us operate with the currency of words” and apparently so does Jesus.

There may be no one I know who loved words more than my paternal grandmother. She was not, what many would consider to be, an educated women but she may have just been the most well read or well spoken woman I ever met. I was told my grandmother would actually read the dictionary to increase her vocabulary. “The currency of words.” The only other person I know that held a dictionary in such high regard was a good friends father who taught Sunday School in his local church for years. My friend told me that his Dad would always take his Bible and dictionary to Sunday School each Sunday. He knew why he took his Bible but not sure why the dictionary because he never used it – that is until one Sunday morning, around Christmas, and reading the Christmas story. He read from Matthew 1, “All this happened in order that the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet

might be fulfilled: 'Behold, the *virgin* will conceive and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us.'" And as only a child could do the question was asked, "What's a virgin, Mr. Cameron?" to which my friend's father grabbed his dictionary and gave the little girl Webster's definition of a virgin. "The currency of words." In fact I read of one Pastor's spouse who believed words had such value that he gave kids in his church graduating from high school a dictionary with this note attached, "Everything you'll need to write in college is contained in this book." (Source: Audrey West) "The currency of words."

But if anyone knew the worth of words, not just reading a dictionary, defining words or giving them away as a gift it was God's chosen people. They were a people weaned in the oral tradition where the most valuable thing they could pass onto their children and grandchildren were not possessions or things but words, beautiful words told His-story. Those words would be shared around about a campfire while eating manna and quail, sung while constructing Pharaoh's pyramid, and loudly proclaimed when fighting the enemies of God. When Israel got in its worst predicaments or wandered furthest from God it was when they did not speak the word of God or hear the Word of God. So to a people, in what many consider to be the most secular world ever, Paul reminds the Roman Church that "the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart," (Romans 10:8), quoting Deuteronomy. "The Word is near."

It's a hard thing for our modern ears to hear because maybe the items in shortest supply these days are words. If we are not replacing words with text speak like "lol" or "rofl" we are using emojis (little symbols that tell people if we are happy or sad, eating or sleeping, driving or walking). Now I need not tell you that the vocabulary of our youth is nothing like that of their parents and even further from their grandparents. If it's true in the world why we would we expect anything different in the church? What you might not know is that something happened in the church, maybe thirty years ago now that became a backlash against words. A new generation rose up in the church and saw what they called "hypocrisy". They saw a people who used the language of love but did not act with love. They saw a people who sang of grace but showed none, prayed of mercy but displayed little. Somehow their "walk" didn't match their "talk," if you know what I mean. So we raised a generation of "good people," people who did much good (don't get me wrong) and who lived by the Golden Rule and followed the wise words of St Francis of Assisi who said, "Preach the gospel at all time and if necessary use words" but there was a problem – no one said anything. That's really the problem Paul attempts to address to the Roman Christians in Romans chapter 10. "For even the Golden Rule is not where Christians are to set their goal," writes Skye Jethani. "On a number of occasions Jesus called his disciples to an even higher command" or what Jethani called "The Platinum Rule."

In ancient Rome and modern day Keswick Paul was attempting to deposit into our accounts the value of words but not just any words but life-saving words. Yes, words must be backed with actions but all things begin with words. "If you confess with your lips." (Romans 10:9a) A relationship with God begins with a proclamation and may I even be so bold to say, "It is not even a *silent* one as many have been led to believe – you know something private between you and God - but actual, audible words. The act of spiritual transformation is not about first changing the way you live. Conversion is not about "being good enough" for God because none of us are going to be good enough. We are never good enough. So don't say, "I'm not ready to give my life to Jesus because I need to get my life in order first." "If you only knew how messy my life was." "I first need to shake that old habit, restore every broken relationship, and see change before I give my life over to Jesus." If that is what you are waiting for, if that's what you think is holding you back let me share some truth with you: If that's what you believe then I guarantee you, you will never make your decision because you are always going to come up short. Instead, Paul says you must first, call on the name of the Lord AND THEN let God change you. In fact Paul is so sure of those who speak up that he says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," And there is the currency of words in action. But still not quite sure what to say? Let me give you some words that I am sure my grandmother must have read over a few times. "I'm sorry." "Forgive me." "Come into my life." "I surrender." "Take control." "I love you Jesus." Those are words you need to say, maybe even right now, right here. Saying them and not just "trying" to live them out but say them, speak them, pray them.

Last week when I asked Allyson what songs she might like to go with her sermon she made a number of suggestions. And then at the end of the email she jokingly said, "But I don't want, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." Now, if you weren't with us last Sunday you may have missed the humour in that statement. If you are speaking on "election" or "God choosing us" you don't want to necessarily be focusing on our choice in the matter because as Allyson mentioned last Sunday – "none of us would choose God." So this week you might have noticed I didn't pick, "They'll Know We Are Christians By Love," And it's not because I don't love the campy song but because it's not entirely true – according to Romans 10. Now again don't get me wrong I believe in "love" but to quote the modern day prophet, Tina Turner, "what's love got to do it" if no one speaks about the One who loves or why we love? If "love alone" becomes the driving force to draw people to Jesus than more would be lovers of Jesus. Because I hate to tell you but there are Muslims that are far more loving than many of us. There are atheists who are able to display love more than many Christians and even a few agnostics who show acts of love far more often than many Christians. According to Paul we need to speak up, the church needs to speak out. We can no longer remain silent.

So we wonder why God matters so little in so many lives? We ask ourselves why our churches are not full? We scratch our heads why Christianity has such little influence? We recoil at what we see on our nightly news or hear on our radios or podcasts? We may attempt to live goodly lives, even carry an occasional placard but what has happened to our voices? "It's not my gift," some say. "I don't speak well," others announce. "I'll let my actions speak louder than my words," others proclaim. "But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them?" (10:14 "The Message") "How can others hear if nobody tells them?" Not sure what to tell them? Again, let me give you some words. "Can I tell you my story?" "Do you know how much Jesus loves you?" "May I tell you?" "Want to hear a convincing proof that Jesus is alive?" "Would you like to come to church with me and hear Jesus' story?"

I'm not good with money. That's why I leave the finances of our house to Allyson. I think we would be "bankrupt" if things were left up to me. As I see the world around me I feel the same way. I see a world, a nation, a province, a community that is spiritually bankrupt but who need not be. Remember, according to Paul we have the currency of words at our disposal. A wealth of words that can transform us and our hearts and words, when bravely and courageously spoken in love, can transform your spouse, your child, your neighbor, your co-worker and even a stranger. But far too often we remain silent in our speaking of God or our words to others so that they will come to love God. I heard the story of a wife who was heartbroken because her husband never told her how much he loved her. So one day she confronted him and asked him why he was silent. He responded, "I told you on the day we were married that I love you. If it changes, I will let you know." Maybe today is the day you use words to tell Jesus how much you love him or speak up to share Jesus with another. God forgive our silence. God gives us the word to say, we pray. Amen.