

Language is important to all of us. Words are important to all of us and especially to me as a preacher. I am a person of reflection, rather than action. I have a morbid fear of losing my sight, of not being able to read. Reading and talking are precious to me. Preaching seems a most natural form of communication.

I cannot imagine how a person can think without words. I read about a deaf child whose parents kept him from going to school. He had no words with which to name things or actions.

All creatures communicate, but humans are unique in communicating with symbols and pictures, using words for abstract ideas. How do you define honour, the purpose of life, the meaning of work, the fear of death? These are all theological ideas, requiring an understanding of words that are difficult to define.

We believe that God, the Creator of the universe, an unknown and invisible Spirit, has communicated with us. This is an amazing idea! Moreover, He has communicated in a way familiar to us: with words. They are words from the mouth of a human like us. This exchange is mind-boggling. A writer put it this way: *The word of God was at the beginning of things with God and became flesh and lived among us.*

Jesus, a man of Judea, is called, *the Word of God*. Jesus says, *If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.* (John 8:31-32).

One of the documents from the **Consultation on Church Union** in 1923-1925, states that the gospel transmitted by the Scriptures is the true treasure of the church. There is a double meaning of the word *true* in this statement. First, the gospel is the church's only treasure. It is the possession of greatest value in the church. Second, the gospel of Christ is the highest truth, the only true guide for living. German theologian, Richard Kroner, was asked if he thought of any non-scriptural writing that might deserve inclusion in the Bible. He responded, *On the basis of my reading, I would have to say an empirical NO! The only writing by a pagan might be Plato's dialogue 'Timaeus,' but that tells little about man's relationship with the Creator.*

Some people are able to crank out a vast flood of words. You know the names of many different people in our generation, John Kennedy, John Wayne, Frank Sinatra, Ed Sullivan, Tommy Douglas, John Diefenbaker, etc. If you mention them to some of our young generation they will ask who you are talking about, or who were they. In another generation, perhaps their names will never be remembered. Martin Luther also produced a flood of words. His tracks, essays, lectures, and sermons filled 56 large volumes. Yet, no one considers them to be on a par with the Scripture.

In fact, the Bible, a whole library of truth, can be held in one hand. All the other documents of equal value could be held in the other hand. Why is the Bible judged so highly? It contains the gospel of God, both in the preaching of the prophets and in the testimony about Jesus. The gospel is the heart of the Bible and our religion. The words of Jesus are distilled truth.

God does not demand the impossible. He does not require moral perfection or intellectual purity. He does however, expect us to try to follow Christ, to make the effort to build peace, to promote justice, and to act compassionately.

The truth, found in the simple parables of Jesus, tell us about trusting God, showing kindness, and behaving with humility. The word of truth is found in the sacrificial death of Jesus at the hands of worldly men. The word *gospel* means *the good story*. It is not a program, rule, philosophy, formula, or plan for life. The gospel is first our friend, Jesus.

He is a friend who reaches out to save us from disappearing into oblivion and darkness. He comforts us with his presence and strength. He walks with us in our daily passage through life. The fountain of words sprayed out by all the preachers in the world is not as important as you are, one Christian, accompanied by the truth.

A minister by the name of Rev. Soker was flying into Albuquerque one evening. As he looked down on the beautiful city, he saw a large building on fire. It was the church where he was the minister! By the time his plane landed, he had remembered the saying, *the church is what is left when the building burns down*. Just as the Word of God is a person, Jesus, the church of God, is her people

We who are disciples of Jesus, are the church. In a special way, we become the word of God as we attempt to carry out Jesus ministry. *Sticks and stones will*

*break my bones, but words will never hurt me* – we all know that, that rhyme is wrong. Words can and do hurt, but words can also comfort. Words that are accompanied with your kind deeds are life giving.

James wrote to the early church, *If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, keep warm and eat you fill, without giving them the things needed for their body, what good is that?* (James 2:15-16). For church people to say to the unemployed and unemployable, *Be at peace, Jesus loves you*, and not be sympathetic to their despair, is not discipleship. We should not be surprised when hopeless people respond with anger to our wishy-washy platitudes. When church people say to the fearful and lonely, *Be comforted, Jesus loves you*, yet do not share time with them, this is not discipleship, we should not be disappointed when they are not grateful. Words are empty unless accompanied by thoughtful action and friendship.

The touch of your hand, says more than a book full of well intentioned words. Edgar Guest wrote in, **The Sermons We See**, I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell me the way.

We often hear that the Protestant Reformation was the result of Martin Luther's rediscovery of the gospel. That is an exaggerated claim. Luther personally discovered the gospel in its purity and power because of his own need to feel worthy in God's eyes. As a result of his joy and relief at fully understanding the gospel, Luther wanted the whole church and all its leaders to make the gospel the foremost message of the church. The church at that time had other messages competing with the gospel – the message of its own authority and power, the message of God's anger and judgment, the message that one might be able to purchase or redeem redemption.

The church had not lost the gospel anymore than has the church today. We too, must constantly strive to make the gospel the main message of the church. Do we deliver to the rest of the world, a message that Canadian Christianity is superior because our country is prosperous and strong? How did we ever get to the point that success in life is measured by amounts of money and possessions? How do capitalism and democracy make Christianity superior to other religions? What message is delivered when Christian people make their national security the most important goal of life?

What Luther and the reformers did was to put the message of Jesus in the forefront. The Augsburg Confession, presented in 1530, carefully pointed out the

distinctive truth of the gospel. The living Christ is present among us in the church, not because of hierarchy or dogma, but because people of faith come together to worship.

The disciples of Christ are a structure of living stones built on the foundation of the apostles' witness. We confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Word of truth for our time. God is an action how to redeem humanity from its moral weakness. When we surrender to the government of God and follow his plan, our lives will be better, our minds will be stronger, and we will be able to advance the kingdom of God in our own small arena of action. What a privilege! What a hope! God is at work in each of us, not because we are worthy, but because God is powerful and compassionate. The *faith of our time* is the same as it was in the past; yet, it is new every day. We must trust the invisible God more than we trust the visible symbols of power – weapons, money, factories, and cities. Jesus invitation still stands: ***Come follow me; I will give you rest.*** Amen.