

**Devotions – March 5-11, 2017**  
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**Sunday, March 5, 2017**

Text: Matthew 4:1-4

**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”**

The devil no doubt figured he was an excellent communicator. Most everyone does seem to get his message loud and clear. Here he did pick a topic about which Jesus had a keen interest. Yet Jesus was able to see about his immediate need and desire to consider the consequences of the devil’s suggestion. I know that when I get hungry, it is hard to think about anything that doesn’t relate to food. We make sure we feed our children at church school when they arrive after school. We understand that they will be able to focus on something besides their stomachs after they’ve eaten; focus we hope on a more spiritual message.

Jesus shows us that we are going to have to go beyond our sweet tooth to find the really good stuff. That which will nourish us and fill us up beyond our next meal is the Word that comes from God. We all need to hear we are loved, we are forgiven, we belong and we have a purpose today. That is what the Word seeks to communicate. But I can still envision that Word as a tasty sandwich that has been liberally spread with grace, the best filler of all.

*So we pray: Open my eyes Lord so I may see the feast that has been laid out for me this day. Open my ears to hear that word that will nourish and fill me up. Open my mind to appreciate the careful planning you have given to balance my life, enabling me to give and be at my best this day. Send me out looking beyond the temptations, so I stay on track and on task for the sake of those around me. Amen*



**Monday, March 6, 2017**

Text: Matthew 5:33-37

**“Again, you have heard it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.**

We know that in the early years of these United States a person was often taken at their word. It was a matter of honor, a personal standard that new and growing villages depended upon. I have been made aware that no one can count on being taken at their word anymore. We need documentation and verification. We need collaborating statements. We need authenticated proof. If we don’t insist on such substantiation we are considered naïve and foolish. It makes me sad when I find myself suspicious of the word of another.

It can be difficult to take their word for it when a person drives up to my office requesting help with gas for their ‘emergency.’ After I hear the circumstances I am never absolutely sure if it has been the whole truth. Perhaps if I practice it faithfully myself I will come to recognize the real story more readily in others.

*Let us pray: Lord, I know that you offer us a ‘Yes’ that is sincere and honest. Thank you for your straight talk and open-hearted acceptance. Be with me this day, guiding my thoughts and words so those around me will be able to know for sure that they can count on me. With me, let there be no more and no less than the truth spoken in the kindest way possible. Amen*



**Tuesday, March 7, 2017**

Text: Matthew 12:33-37

**“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

Jesus sounds upset with his listeners, pretty much at the end of his rope. He has referred to the power of words – they can build up another’s self-esteem and they can also tear apart. When Jesus addresses those who have been critical of him and his healing, He labels them: “You brood of vipers!” He was only telling the truth and wanting to impress on them the power of a word. In this age, we are learning more and more decisively that words cannot be

erased, so their power is retained like a long-lasting battery. Think of the Facebook and Twitter and even email comments that have been recorded and then seem to have been written in stone, no delete button really erases them. So we need to create a new edition, an amplified version, for the ancient knowledge that one cannot take back words once spoken.

Jesus reminds us that those words can be traced back even deeper than to your electronic records, they go back to your heart. A thoughtless word is really one that likely reflects our unguarded but accurate character and feelings. It is from that source which our actions will flow. Therefore our words will be the evidence that will judge us. What can we do? How can we learn to control our lips and now our typing fingers too? Let us pray:

*Oh, dear Jesus, help me to listen first to you. Listen before I speak. Listen before I respond. Slow down my quick tongue and my racing thoughts. There truly are vipers in our world, waiting to strike. Make me cautious and thoughtful so that I can be effective through my words and gracious in my actions. May it be the good things for which I reach from the treasure chest and share throughout this day. In Your name, Amen*



**Wednesday, March 8, 2017**

Text: John 5:24-27

**“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.**

**“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”**

We enjoy hearing the news about people we know. If there is a little scandal or a hint of misdeed in the story, all the better! Gossip is endlessly fascinating it seems, so it is even hard not to read the headlines of the tabloids as we go through the checkout line. We can't help but wonder if there is some bit of truth in it and which part should we believe? This message from Jesus has an interesting comment: Jesus says the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. The dead can hear? That almost sounds like a headline from a tabloid. When that occurs we can be sure the hour will be here.

We should consider there is more than one way to experience death. Our spirit, our ambition, our sense of purpose, our very feelings may suffer a dying, a deadening. There is a promise in these verses that come through the Word, the Word that Jesus speaks and is; the promise of Life. What Jesus brings is the source of life, an abundant life, a clarity of life, so we

can choose between that which is life-giving and that which will only bring a death. Salvation is in God's hands. But how well we attend to the voice of Christ will determine our experience of a full-life today. It is no tabloid tale but a precious truth we are given.

*We pray: Dear Lord, come to me with life, give me a promising, invigorating, rousing sense of growth. Help me hear the sounds of being all around. Stir up in me a trust that promotes some risk-taking enabling me to speak your Word that brings new life. In Jesus, Amen.*



**Thursday, March 9, 2017**

Text: Luke 6:46-49

**“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”**

What would we be like if we truly heard Jesus and acted on His Word? If only I were so consistent, so in harmony, that my actions really matched the image I want to portray of myself. If, only. The doctor says I will feel better if I would only cut down on the caffeine and sweets. If, only. I know that is true and the advice is sound. It is not a complicated concept or an unreasonable request. But I don't want to do it! I like my soda and cookies. I can hardly blame him for my difficulties if I refuse to listen to his word. I do need to own up to the decisions I make. That is pretty much what Lent is to be about, looking at ourselves honestly and owning up to our responsibilities.

Somehow I am not so clear when it is Jesus who offers the word of wisdom and truth. Because Jesus loves me I expect Him to make exceptions for me. I would like Him to find an easier solution for me; after all He knows my situation and should make allowances. I don't want Jesus to take a tough love approach but what other love is there that actually constitutes love? That house that is being built through my efforts will not withstand the floods that will be thrown at it if cheap materials are used and the workmanship is shoddy and I try to bypass the foundation. If only I always used Jesus' building plans. If, only.

*Let us pray: Dear Master-builder, keep your patience with me. Sometimes I seem to suffer from forgetfulness when it comes to the direction you offer so lovingly. When the plans get ignored or circumvented, forgive me. Save me from myself and gently remind me to return*

*to you, to your blueprint. My negligence will invariably affect others, those you have entrusted to me. Help me again, O Lord. Amen*



**Friday, March 10, 2017**

Text: Romans 10:8b-11

**...(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”**

As Christians the word Christ has for us is the very word we are to communicate to others. It can be scary to pass along that message because we don't know how it may be heard and received. We think others might not be interested in what we believe. They already have their own understanding of the meaning of life and how they have determined to reach their goals. They may not care what I accept as guiding principles, as long as I don't try to impose it on them or on anyone else.

Paul makes it clear that faith that is so deeply felt, as it comes from the heart, will just have to come out. In one way or another we will blurt it out. (It might be better if we are prepared for it.) We believe we are saved and to be saved is to know such relief, such gratitude, and a sense of security that we will simply have to express it. The best part of this promise is that '**no one who believes in Him will be put to shame.**' That should take away some anxiety. We can put aside our worry about being embarrassed or put down for our lack of eloquence or coherence. The main thing is to just say what is in our heart.

Let us pray: *Dear God, You know what is in my heart. You have used me before to share your word and pass on a morsel of grace. Be with me today, to speak out with courage, to work for justice, to stand up against hatred. I know that You are with me so I will not be standing alone. Hold me up when I get weary or weak. Okay, let's get to it. Amen*



**Saturday, March 11, 2017**

Text: Romans 10:12-17

**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.**

Communication is so essential. We can't live in community without it. We must find ways to get across the vital information, it must be taught to children, it needs to be reiterated to youth so they understand. The needed warnings must be made to any in danger. For simple communiques we can manage with lights, or bells, or sirens. They will signal us to stop or go, to run for help or take shelter. But for anything that needs a little more detail, words become very helpful.

What good word do you have to share today? Is it a word of welcome and acceptance? Is it a word that simply declares your own confidence because the Lord is your Lord? Do you have a word of hope for the lonely or despairing one in your midst?

Faith comes from what is heard, heard in the very word of Christ. Take that word of love wherever you go. Be generous with anyone you encounter. Do not keep silent when you have such an indispensable word to share.

*Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You send us out as your ambassadors into a world that is so in need of your saving touch. Fill me with the words of life. Make me aware of the moment that is ripe for me to proclaim your love. Hold me by the hand and take me among those who need us. May the signals be read correctly so all may come to believe in You. Amen*

