

April 13, 2008

DVD Mini-Movie: The Power of Words (worshiphousemedia.com)

Title: ***Speak Sweeter***

Text: James 3:1-12

Thesis: Words are powerful...

Series Introduction:

Tim McGraw's hit song *Live Like You Were Dying*, is the springboard for the current series of messages. The song is the story of a man who learned he was dying of a fatal disease and what he learned about living his final days well. It is a song about what he found to be important and how he hoped everyone could have the chance to live like they only had thirty days to live.

The series is based on the materials provided for the Live Like You Were Dying Church Campaign Resource Kit available from WWW.LLYWD.ORG. In addition to the suggested sermon titles and general outlines, I have attempted to cite any other specific references lifted from the resources.

Message Introduction:

In our last parish, my personal physician was also a member of our church and a friend. One day when I went to his office, his nurse assigned me an examination room, where I sat patiently... waiting. When he came into the room I wanted to say, "Physician, heal thyself!" He had some fairly new and nasty abrasions on one side of his face and his arm. So I asked, "Tom, what happened?" And he told me how he had been walking on his treadmill one evening and making faces at his kiddos when the treadmill spun him off the back, trapping him between the wall and the treadmill, which continued to race along while he scrambled to extricate himself from it all.

Sometimes life feels like that... we are on this treadmill, trying to keep up and deal with all the distractions along the way when suddenly off we go.

In the book of James, we are reminded that while on the treadmill of life we are busy making plans about today or tomorrow. Then, while the treadmill is racing along beneath our feet, God asks, "How do you know what will happen tomorrow? Don't you know your life is like a morning fog which is here for a short time and then is gone?" James 4:13-7

That text is a good reminder that the days of our lives are literally in the hands of Almighty God.

Last week we were reminded of the brevity of live and the need to live like we were dying... embracing every day as a gift from God and living in the present with eternity in mind.

In Tim McGraw's song, *Live Like You Were Dying*, he sings of how he asked a man who was dying what he did when he realized he had a short time to live. And he said, "*I went sky diving; I went rocky mountain climbing; I sent two point seven second on a bull named Fumanchu. And I loved deeper, and I spoke sweeter, And I gave forgiveness, I'd been denying.*"

I think it is interesting how once he got through doing all the thrilling, death defying things, he settled in and focused on nurturing his relationships with God and with people during the last days of his life.

This morning we are going to look at the idea of speaking sweeter, as one of the best way we can live when we live like we are dying.

Speak Sweeter

When we watched the Power of Words clip, we were reminded of the power of the tongue. The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21

The misspoken word has a life of its own. It does not die once it is out there...

In an interview with John Gibson (You Tube, Geraldine Ferraro: Obama's winning because he's not white, gibsonradio.com), Geraldine Ferraro said, "If Barack Obama were a white man or if he were a woman, he would not be in the position he is in." In other words, he is in the race because of his race. Her words did not die there on gibsonradio.com. Once her words were out there and perceived by many as racist, they live on in the memories of people and You Tube. She resigned from her position with the Clinton Campaign.

When Reverend Wright, in an inflammatory sermon said, "No, not God bless America, God damn America [for the way America has treated black people]." His words did not die there... his words live on in the memories of those who were offended by his words and anyone who accesses You Tube can hear the rant anytime they go online for a long, long time. Reverend Wright's words forced him to leave the Obama Campaign. The tongue and the words it speaks, have the power of life and death.

Interestingly enough words hold the power of both life and death and the tongue is capable of speaking both praises and curses.

Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. And so

blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! James 3:9-10

Bonnie and I recently purchased a computer and took the big leap from dial-up to Broadband DSL. The person who arranged for the installation of Broadband told us that on April 8 a technician would make the hook up so we would have wireless internet access. He said the technician would come between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. and that he would call one hour before coming. And he added, we were to wait until after 5 p.m. to go online. At 4 p.m. I called the 1.800 # and was told that it was still pending and that the window actually was open until 7 p.m.. So I waited until 7 p.m. and then phoned in again and was told that it was still pending. The next morning I checked again and asked when he was going to come and was told that what he does is not done at my house but at the junction box for my area and that it was just a thirty second stop to flip a switch... and that it was not necessary for me to wait for him. And... he had activated our service early on the 8th.

The pastor that prays the pastoral prayer on Sunday morning was very close to expressing thoughts somewhat less praise worthy. And it is precisely because we are capable of spewing forth both blessing and cursing that we are reminded that life is just too short and uncertain to be speaking words that neither glorify God nor encourage others.

So today, we will look at three ways we can speak sweeter.

The first way we can speak sweeter is to:

1. Appreciate People

The bible says that gratitude is a defining characteristic of a Christian. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done. Colossians 2:7

We are encouraged to let our lives overflow with gratitude to God and others... yet, many of us spend much of our brief lives grumbling and complaining. The Broadband person didn't phone as promised. The eggs are too runny. The clerk was snippy. I sent my grandson a birthday gift and he didn't send me a thank you note... I think I'll just miss his next birthday and teach him a lesson. This is the worst haircut I've ever had. Why do people always park so close to my car that I can't even open the door? They need to start plowing as soon as it begins snowing instead of waiting until we have three feet on the ground. How can the Broncos let a guy like Jason Elam go?

Years ago a farmer and his wife attended our church. One day in the coffee shop Ted told a story about the time, early in their marriage when he asked

his wife, Phyllis, to help him sort the calves off from their mothers for weaning. She did. He asked her to run the gate... when the cows and calves circled the corral, she was to open the gate and let the cows out but keep the calves in. Well, it wasn't all that easy and eventually a calve scooted out with it's mother and Ted lost his temper. From across the corral he yelled at Phyllis, "Don't you know anything?"

He said she said, "Yes I do! I know the way to the house!" And then he added, "And Phyllis has never helped me sort cattle since."

He shared his story in the context of having learned over the years that it would have been much kinder to have said, "It's okay honey. I appreciate your helping me sort these cattle." And it would have also been much wiser because he lost a cowhand.

I know life is not always easy but words of ingratitude, criticism, grumbling, and complaining are never acceptable speech for followers of Christ.

The bible says, No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. I Thessalonians 5:18

But ingratitude is especially hurtful when someone God or someone else blesses you. In the gospel of Luke, there is a story of ten lepers.

As he entered the village there, ten lepers stood at a distance, crying out, "Jesus, have mercy on us!" He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, their leprosy disappeared. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus shouting, "Praise God, I'm healed!" He fell on his face at Jesus' feet thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Does only this foreigner return to give glory to God?" Luke 17:12-18

Jesus noticed that nine out of ten men who were exceptionally blessed by God did not take time to speak even a word of appreciation..

One of the ways we can express our gratitude is to: Say "thanks" to people that serve you

A second way we can express our gratitude is to: Say "thanks" to the people that shaped you

When I was in high school, a missionary to Africa stayed at our house while visiting our church on missionary tour. Her name was Grace Skudder. While there she learned that I was planning to become a pastor

and before she left, she gave me twenty dollars to use toward my theological training.

The years passed and one day, after I had been a pastor for many years, I thought of Miss Skudder and wanted to thank her for her foresight and kindness. So I went to work and tracked her down... she was still alive and living with her sister in California. I eventually got a phone number and called. Her sister answered and I told her my story and asked if I could speak to Miss Skudder. Her sister then told me that she was in an advanced stage of Alzheimer's and would not be able to speak with me on the phone.

Sometimes we just wait too long to thank the people who have shaped us. So we make it our aim to speak sweeter by expressing gratitude to God and others... those who serve us and those who are or have shaped us.

The second way we can speak sweeter is to:

2. Encourage people

At Christmas time, our children and grandchildren visited us for a week. The morning after they had left, I showered. When I was finished, the bathroom was pretty steamy and there on the steam-covered mirror were the words, "Matti Rocks!" Matti had written "Matti Rocks!" on the steamed over mirror and now every time the mirror steamed over, her message appeared. We didn't clean the mirror for a couple of months... it was so much fun to see it there every day.

Not long ago a television documentary highlighted the life of a woman who was facing serious health issues. The interviewer asked her how she managed to face all of the challenges. She got up from the couch and led the interviewer and camera crew through her bedroom and into the master bath where she pointed to the mirror. There, written in lipstick by her daughter were the words, "The best gift I could give you is the gift to be able to see yourself as I see you. You are my hero." (Live Like Your Were Dying Campaign, Speak Sweeter, P. 7)

Words of blessing and encouragement are powerful and life changing.

The bible says, Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

May God grant us the diligence to push through good intentions to good actions and the speaking of encouraging words to others.

Blessing others was the exact thing Jesus was doing at the time of his ascension. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Luke 24:51

We ought not miss any opportunity to speak words of encouragement. The writer of Hebrews reminds us to, encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13

I am a Franklin Planner man... I probably should graduate to some sort of handheld electronic gadget but I like the feel of a leather, paper, and pen. I prefer to put my stuff on paper. Every day I use what the Franklin Covey people call a Prioritized Daily Task List. Everything is assigned an order of importance and ideally, each task is managed accordingly throughout the day.

I try to have on that list names of people to whom I want to send a note of appreciation or a word of encouragement. I haven't always done it and I don't always do it... but I try.

It is a God pleasing and people blessing thing to make the expressing of encouraging words a daily practice.

A third way we can speak sweeter is to:

3. Pray for people

One of the best ways we can use our words is to bless God and care for others is to pray. We express praise and thanksgiving to God for his goodness and we lift others up to God by remembering them in our prayers. We pray for God's blessing and protection over those we love. We pray for specific needs and concerns we have for each of them. We pray about big things and little things.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we bless God and pray for ourselves and others:

"Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen"

God cares that we care about Him and others and he invites us to formulate and express words in our prayers. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it. Hebrews 4:16

Hopefully, as we begin to be conscientious about speaking sweeter, we will express our selves in words of:

- Appreciation to people,
- Encouragement to people,
- Prayer in love and concern for people.

The bible says, Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere. Ephesians 6:18

It is important that we always keep in mind the power of God and the affect of persistence.

A year ago, an associated press story came out of England about when a man named Alec Holden turned 90. When he was 90 years old, he placed a bet equivalent to \$200 American that he would live to be 100. A betting company placed his odds at 250:1. On April 24, 2007, Alec Holden collected \$50,000.

When the media asked him how he did it, he credited porridge as his number one source of survival and confessed that leading up to his big payoff, he was “very careful” and frequently reminded himself to “keep breathing.” (Brian Lowery, PreachingToday.com; Associated Press, Bet on Century Wins..., www.guardian.co.uk, 4.24.07 and “Good Week for Incentives,” The week, 5.4.07, p.8)

Persistence is important in breathing and in prayer. Jesus said, “Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks. You parents – if your children ask for bread, do you give them a stone instead? If they ask for fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.” Matthew 7:7-11

When we were living in southern California, our son quickly adjusted from playing in the dirt to playing on concrete. One of the first things he wanted was a skateboard. He did not stop asking for one until he got one. And when we took him to the store and bought him the one he picked out.

I did not hear his asking as unreasonable. I did not get exasperated by his asking. In fact, I was glad that he continued to ask because then, I knew his desire was not just some fleeting fad.

God wants to hear our prayers and God wants to bless us and those we love with his answers.

The producers of the Live Like You Were Dying remind us that if we had only 30 days to live, perhaps using some of that time to **speak sweeter by speaking words of appreciation to people, speaking words of encouragement to people, and by speaking prayers for people. And that it may not be until we step into eternity that we realize just how much of an impact our words and our prayers in this life have really had. (Live Like You Were Dying, Speak Sweeter, P. 11)**

**Let's finish where we began. The tongue has the power of life and death...
Proverbs 18:21**

Toward the end of the story of the Outlaw Josie Wales, Josie negotiated peace with a Comanche Chief named Ten Bears. When Ten Bears responded to Josie's proposal he said, "Your words hold the power of life and death. Let us choose life." (The Outlaw Josie Wales, Warner Brothers, June 30, 1976)

As we go into this new week Living Like We Were Dying, may we choose life. May our words to whomever we speak have a life giving domino effect.