

O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Exodus 3:13-15 God's special name

13 But Moses said to God, "If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they are going to ask me, 'What's this God's name?' What am I supposed to say to them?"

14 God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am.^[a] So say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'"

15 God continued, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.

John 1:1-18 Story of the Word

1In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

2The Word was with God in the beginning.

3Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being

4 through the Word was life,^[a]
and the life was the light for all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

6 A man named John was sent from God. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. **8** He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

9 The true light that shines on all people
was coming into the world.

10The light was in the world,
and the world came into being through the light,
but the world didn't recognize the light.

11The light came to his own people,
and his own people didn't welcome him.

12But those who did welcome him,
those who believed in his name,
he authorized to become God's children,
nor from human desire or passion,
but born from God.

14 The Word became flesh
and made his home among us.

We have seen his glory,

glory like that of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.

15 John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"

16 From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;

17 as the Law was given through Moses,
so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God.

God the only Son,
who is at the Father's side,
has made God known.

The Power of Words: The Word Above All Words!

This scripture from John 1 is the story of the power of words!! It is actually the story of the power of THE WORD. And it takes us back to the beginning.

In Genesis 1, God spoke the words, "Let there be **light**," and there was light. As God continued to speak, the words of God brought forth **life**. The word brought forth all of creation --- plants, birds and fish, mountains and seas and also human kind.

In the beginning.

Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

The Word is powerful and creative -- the Word brings light and life!

But as we continue reading.....the story about the Word shifts. The story John really wants to tell is the story of the Word Made Flesh -- the story becomes the story of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The Word became flesh and made his home among us.

The ultimate way that God communicates with us is through the Word made flesh. One writer said that Jesus "was a living, breathing Word from God--sent to reveal God and God's kingdom to us."¹ The way we best come to understand the nature and character of God is through the life of Jesus. The way God best communicates with us about how we are supposed to speak and act is through the Word made flesh. And it is in a relationship with Jesus, the Word made flesh, that we each can experience light and life and begin to even reflect the light and life of God to the world.

Today is the last of our sermon series the Power of Words. Over the last month, we have practiced using our words to build others up rather than to tear them down, we have practiced using life-giving words with our families, and Bud even gave us the important message about minding our words when we speak about politics. It has been clear from the scripture we've read that part of being followers of Jesus involves using words that will bring light and life to others.

¹ Dick Donovan, SermonWriter.com.

Today, we turn in another direction -- with three final and important topics. We are going to look at the words we use when we speak about and to God, the words we speak to ourselves and the word that God speaks to us.

First, what kind of words do we, and should we use to speak to and about God. In Exodus 20 verse 7 we find the Third Commandment:

Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance; the Lord won't forgive anyone who uses his name that way.

You may have heard it translated like this: "Do not take the Lord's name in vain." But I especially like the way the Common English Bible translation says it. "Do not use God's name as if it were of no significance."

Now, honestly the first thing that probably comes to mind is using God's name in a curse or an exclamation even, and that's something to correct in our speech, but it also goes deeper. So let's start by thinking about what God's name is and what that name might mean. You may be familiar with the story of the burning bush from Exodus 3. Moses comes into the presence of God, and God tells Moses to go and lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And among other excuses, Moses says basically, I don't even know your name. When the Israelites ask your name, what do I say? And God says this to Moses:

"I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'"

Kind of a strange name. Although God has many names *Yahweh* or *I Am Who I Am* is the most mysterious and holy. Adam Hamilton wrote that it means something like "I am the source of all that is."² Dr. Michael Williams describes Yahweh as meaning, "I exist," a statement of being as well as a covenant name. He says Yahweh means I am the God who is always faithful, the one who keeps my promise, the one who is here for you. Yahweh means -- I am your God!³

And isn't it interesting that during his lifetime Jesus used this name of God (I AM) to explain that he was not just a prophet or a teacher, but that he was also this same Holy God. The Word made flesh identified himself with this holy name. There are several "I am" sayings recorded throughout the gospels. I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the way, the truth and the life. In other words Jesus is saying, "I am your God, you are my people, and I will give you life and light!"

So, how do we respond to this God who wants a covenant relationship with us? What words would be pleasing to Yahweh? We can look to the way that Jesus taught his disciples how to pray when he taught them the Lord's prayer. This prayer is a great model of the way that we are to speak to God. One thing the Lord's Prayer teaches us is to recognize God's name as hallowed. We are to hallow God -- to respect, honor and revere God. In speaking to God, we first recognize God is God, and we are not! As we talk to and about God the key is to not trivialize God's name!

But even more damaging are the times that humans weaponize or even radicalize God's name and God's word. Let me give you one extreme example.

In 1996, the Spokane Bank Robbers left business cards with a Celtic Cross and references to Yahweh, Obadiah 18, and "His Wrath" at the scene of bank robberies and bombings. They believed they were literally carrying out God's work by attacking banks, an abortion clinic and

² Small Group Guide, Church of the Resurrection, September 7, 2014.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvtIw9u2x7o>

the local newspaper office. They viewed each of these targets as representing evil, Satanic influences.⁴

This may sound extreme, but the Southern Poverty Law Center has a whole series of articles on their website called “Hate in God’s Name.” God doesn’t hate, and God’s people should not either. Speech like that is evil.

But there are more subtle ways that we use God’s name and God’s word to express condemnation and judgment rather than love. Perhaps you or someone you know has experienced such a thing. I once met a person who shared the horrific story of being told when her child died that her faith was not great enough or her child would have lived. How destructive it is to use the Word to tear down rather than to build up.

Friends, God is love and God is light. In God there is no darkness at all. And I cannot believe that God would ever be anything else! So, I think we have to be very careful if we claim to speak for God that our words would only bring light and life and love into someone’s life! So, the question is -- do our words and deeds draw others to God or turn them away? Do the words we speak about God bring the light and life of Christ or not?

Second, let’s talk about the words that we speak to ourselves.

The shocking thing about God is that this holy and hallowed God would want a relationship with us. John proclaims in verse 13 that those who receive the light - those who believe in Christ, are children of God; that’s what we are -- children of the Most High God! John says that we have received grace upon grace; we have received love heaped upon love from God. I hope you can see your great worth and value to God. And I pray you are able to use words of grace for yourself.

But sometimes it’s hard to see our own worth to God. Sometimes we have so internalized negative words that we heard during childhood or across the span of our lives that we find it difficult to erase those negative words. In studying the enneagram, I have learned that some personality types have more negative self-talk than others. For example One’s on the enneagram scale have an inner voice that is overly critical.

Now, we are certainly called to examine ourselves regularly---to consider how we may have failed to love God and our neighbor and to confess that, and to make corrections in our speech and behavior. But self-examination does not have to result in self-condemnation that tears us down.

At times we find it hard to forgive ourselves for past mistakes. Sometimes we pastors hear people say that while they understand that God has forgiven them for a past mistake, they can never forgive themselves. Christian counselor Bruce Narramore wrote in his book *No Condemnation* that if we say that we can’t forgive ourselves, we seem to think we have higher standards for ourselves than God does! How can we trust our own self-condemning feelings more than God’s forgiveness?⁵ If we have confessed..... God has forgiven. And if God has forgiven.....it is time to forgive ourselves.

I found a helpful article called *Ten Simple Ways to Stop Self-Criticism* by clinical psychologist Nick Wignall. You will have a link to read it in the Higher, Deeper, Broader discussion guide. The author says one good tip is to follow “The Other Golden Rule” which is, “Treat yourself like you would treat a good friend.”⁶ Would you agree that a lot of times we

⁴ <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name>

⁵ GPS, September 7, 2014, Church of the Resurrection..

⁶ <https://nickwignall.com/self-criticism/>

would never say to others the things we say to ourselves? We would never hold others to the same impossible standard we hold for ourselves. So why not try it? The next time you make a mistake or do something you regret, why not make sure you treat yourself like you would a good friend. Do the words we speak to ourselves allow the light and life of God into our inner beings? The word is life and light for all -- even for ourselves.

And that brings us to the third topic of the day: the words that God speaks to us. You see, sometimes we tell ourselves that we are unlovable, unworthy, unintelligent, uninteresting and all kinds of other un's. But the main message for you today, is that this is **not** the word that God speaks to us. The word of God speaks light and life to us.

Do you remember that in the beginning God's word brought forth light?

Do you remember that in the beginning God's word brought forth life?

Well, my friends Jesus is God's Word. He is the Word Above All Words, he is the Word made flesh. God speaks to us in the clearest way possible -- by sending a living breathing example of how to love God and how to love people. No longer would humans have to rely on the law-givers and prophets of the past, but now God's message was wrapped in flesh and blood.⁷ And on the Mount of Transfiguration God told the disciples: "This is my Son. Listen to him!" God's ultimate word is Jesus, and we ought to listen!

And the message that Jesus came to communicate with us is this: people matter to God! The message is that lost and broken and weary people matter to God. People who are stressed and anxious and depressed matter to God. People who are sick and disabled and grieving matter to God. People who are fighting demons matter to God. Both Republicans and Democrats matter to God. Both poor and rich matter to God. Your family matters to God. And you matter to God. No matter how dark your life may seem, you matter to God. And God will relentlessly seek you until you are found -- like the one lost sheep and the prodigal who both strayed far from home.

You matter to God so much that God sent his Son to be the Word for us....

-- to show us how to live; to show us how to love

-- to show us how to bear all things

--to give us hope as we face death,

--and to anticipate the joy of our own resurrection and eternal life.

In John 6:63, Jesus tells his disciples this:

The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Jesus's words are spirit and life!

Won't you hear the Word?

Won't you listen?

John 1 talks about how God's own people didn't recognize Jesus -- when the light came into the world.

But those who believe in him

-- **those who believe in him**

-- they are called children of God.

So, Holy God, shine your light on us. We need it. Some days look really dark. Open our eyes this day to fully experience the light of your love. Open our ears this day to listen to the Word, and open our hearts to respond.....to become your people in all that we think, say or do. We commit anew this very day to receive the grace upon grace that you offer us. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁷ Small Group Guide, September 7, 2014, Church of the Resurrection.