

12th September 2021 – Morning Service

A Word in season

Rev Helen Croft

Call to Worship

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)

Words are the human ability to express our inner intelligence, feelings and intuitions. Words enable us to formulate thoughts, and these thoughts can then be expressed in the written or spoken word and communicated to others. Today is Education Sunday; teachers, lecturers, professors and other educators use words. Words are powerful things. When we are learners, we sometimes feel that those who teach us talk too much. We might get told to be quiet if we interrupt, or talk when we should be working. A word of praise can make us feel really good, but we might feel sad or uncomfortable if our teachers give us less positive feedback. The theme for Education Sunday this year is 'A Word in Season'.

So let us use our words now to worship God and welcome all into his house.

StF 409 – Let us build a house

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| 1) Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions: | 3) Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us: |
| Ch) <i>All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.</i> | 4) Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger: |
| 2) Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: | 5) Let us build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: |

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Prayer of Praise

Father Almighty, Your glory is spoken of throughout Creation. We offer praise and worship to You from our hearts. Lord Jesus Christ, You came to proclaim good news and lay down Your life for us. We offer praise and worship to You from our hearts. Holy Spirit, You are the fount of all wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We offer praise and worship to You from our hearts. God of all grace and compassion, whose ways are perfect, whose words give us life, whose love seeks to draw us together in harmony to build Your heavenly kingdom; May we walk in truth and grace day by day in our teaching and learning in our living in community in the building up of one another. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

As we come to our prayer of confession, think back to the conversations you had yesterday: Did you say something encouraging to someone? Did someone say something encouraging to you? Did you say something negative? Did someone say something negative to you? What effect did it have on other people? What effect did it have on you?

So let us pray...

Loving God,

We know that we do not always choose the right words to say and that sometimes we have hurt people with our words and actions. Forgive us for the wrong we have done and help us to speak kindly.

StF 501 – Help us O Lord to learn

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| 1) Help us, O Lord, to learn
The truths your word imparts,
To study that your laws may be
Inscribed upon our hearts. | 2) Help us, O Lord, to live
That faith which we proclaim,
That all our thoughts and
words and deeds
May glorify your name. | 3) Help us, O Lord, to teach
The beauty of your ways,
That all who seek may find
the Christ,
And make a life of praise. |
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Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me?

Reflection

When I was growing up, if my mother wanted to get my attention or if I hadn't followed some instruction she'd given, she would use my full name and it would go something like this, Helen Ann Croft, I'm talking to you, did you hear me? The seven-year old me would cheekily respond – my ears did but my legs didn't!

In our reading from Isaiah today, God wants to get our attention and our obedience. Four times in these few verses, He identifies himself as the 'Sovereign Lord'. It is a title that reminds us that God is the almighty Creator and Owner who claims our full obedience. This is one of four passages in Isaiah that speaks of The Servant – this passage speaks of the Obedient Servant.

The start of this chapter (verses 1-4) shows us that Israel had been disobedient to God and as a result, two things had happened to them. (1) God issued a 'certificate of divorce' – Israel 'married' the Sovereign Lord with she accepted the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20) but she had broken the marriage vows by worshipping idols. (2) Israel had sold themselves into slavery in order to pay off their debt of sin by refusing to listen to God. But the Sovereign Lord reveals there is a Servant who is obedient in listening, obedient in destination and obedient in suffering

Obedient in Listening

According to Isaiah, the Servant obediently listens to God (v4) – the Sovereign Lord instructs the Servant in the same way as a teacher instructs a student. We see this in the life of Moses – he was first instructed in the courts of Pharaoh before then being instructed by God in the wilderness. God gives Moses the instructions of what to do and say. Before we can give instructions, we first need to learn.

The Obedient Servant Jesus, also needed an ‘instructed tongue’. Have you ever considered, that the eternal Son of God, whose very nature is God, needed to be taught wisdom from above? The Gospels reveal to us that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Luke also tells us that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed – Jesus was in constant prayer – he was praying without ceasing, time and again He went to God – prayer for the Jew involved spending time reading, mediating and studying the Word of God (the Torah).

Jesus learned obedience as He struggled to listen to God. Jesus was learning His lessons so He had something to give. All of God’s servants today need to speak with an instructed tongue. We need to expose ourselves to the wisdom of heaven.

The Servant obediently learns His lessons ‘to know the word that sustains the weary’ (v4).

There are many people who are weary – whether that be the poor, the sick, the leper, the lame, the hungry, the widow, the orphan, the discouraged, those who think their work is in vain, those who are in the depths of despair. But the word of the Servant is ‘come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ (Matt 11:28)

Jesus, the Obedient servant of the Sovereign Lord, has a word of rest for the weary. This rest that Jesus is talking about is not rest on a lovely spring mattress or comfortable arm-chair, or lazing on a beach somewhere. We are talking about rest in Jesus, we are talking about coming to Jesus. We are talking about believing in Jesus. We are talking about salvation in Jesus. ‘Come to me – find rest in me’.

Jesus gave this message with boldness but his message faced a hostile audience, yet He gave a word of rest for weary sinners. We also are called to speak boldly with an instructed tongue in the face of opposition, ridicule or mockery. We mustn’t be afraid to speak the truth, regardless of what the world wants to hear or the hostility we will get.

Obedient in Destination

The Servant was also obedient in His destination. Now this is where we read into the passage a little of what we know because of the New Testament – the Servant, Jesus was not rebellious, he set his face like flint – flint is a very hard type of rock. When struck against steel, a flint edge produces sparks to start a fire. To set your face like flint implies you are expecting sparks but you proceed anyway. Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He knew there would be sparks – he was expecting trouble, he was expecting suffering and death, He was expecting the cross and the grave. Yet, He went anyway.

Jesus had many opportunities to abandon the task He was sent to complete. Yet, he went unwavering. He was steadfast in achieving His purpose. Jesus, the Servant obediently went to his destination to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Why? So we can be saved! But what about you and me when God asks us to walk a particular destination. Are we prepared to walk our destiny, no matter what the cost?

Obedient in Suffering

Jesus wasn’t just obedient in listening, in his destiny but he was also obedient in his suffering (verse 6) He offered his back...his cheeks...his face. It wasn’t something imposed on Him, but He underwent all of this willingly! He knew Judas would betray him, He knew the disciples were willing to fight for Him, He knew He could call legions of angels to His defence but he went. The iron will that this must have required. Many of us tend to shrink from suffering, especially if we feel it is unjust. But Jesus chose to submit to suffering. Why? So we can be saved!

Our passage (verses 7-9) ends with The Servants statement of why he endured all – because of faith in God and in His help. The Sovereign Lord helps me...I will not be put to shame...He who vindicates me...who then will bring charges against me...The Sovereign Lord helps me...who will condemn? What faith in God and His help and His promises.

By faith, Jesus listened to God. By faith, Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. By faith, Jesus submitted to suffering and shame. It was all by faith. Therefore, writes Paul, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:9-11)

By faith He submitted His mind, His voice, His body to the will of the Sovereign Lord.
What about you and me?

StF 157 – God has spoken – by his prophets

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|---|---|
| 1) God has spoken - by his prophets,
Spoken his unchanging word,
Each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
One firm anchor holds us fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last. | 3) God is speaking - by his Spirit,
Speaking to our hearts again,
In the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then,
Through the rise and fall of nations
One sure faith yet standing fast;
God still speaks, his word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last. |
| 2) God has spoken - by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
Brightness of the Father's glory,
With the Father ever one;
Spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all. | |

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Prayers of Intercession

Dear God, We thank you for our schools, colleges and universities: for those who learn, those who teach and those who support. We remember children and young people who do not have access to education because they cannot afford it, because their families need them to work or because the society in which they live does not make it possible for them. We think of those whose education has been disrupted by natural disasters, by disease or by political situations. We thank you for those who campaign for education for all, who work to improve access to education, and for all who use the education they have received for the benefit of others. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 487 – You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with joy and be led forth
with peace,
And the mountains and the hills shall break
forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the field shall clap,
shall clap their hands,

And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.

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Closing prayer

Let us go now to offer words of love and words to live by, words in times of need, words of hope when someone is struggling, and words that sow a seed.
The blessing of God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit be with you wherever you offer words now and always. **Amen**