

# **First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**

**Sunday, August 22, 2021**

**The Book of Proverbs**

**“Proverbs: The Wisdom of Words and Silence**

**Rev. Emily Riley Campbell**

## **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements**

Hello! Today is Sunday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>. My name is Rev. Emily Campbell and I'd like to welcome you to worship at the First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. Thank you for joining us from wherever you are today.

Friends, we are excited. as a church, because our church building will soon be reopening, not just on Sundays but throughout the week! Beginning September 1<sup>st</sup>, our church staff will be moving back into the building. After a long time away, due to COVID and due to our own building renovations, after 530 days, our staff will be returning to work beginning on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

The changes to our worship services will begin the Sunday following Labor Day, which is September 12<sup>th</sup>, at which time our sanctuary service will begin at 9:30 a.m., and our Upper Room service will be at 11:05 a.m. We hope you will join us from wherever you are at that time.

As you may already know, in the eighteen months that our church building has been closed our building has undergone extensive renovations. Thanks in large part to the amazing work and talent of our building and grounds team, as a church we are weekly blessed by their efforts. Our sanctuary renovations are almost complete. The sanctuary ceiling has been painted and new, additional lighting is being installed. Approximately 50% of the new lighting remains to be installed. The pews are back in the sanctuary. Volunteers are running test trials on live streaming systems. More changes will come when our new pew cushions arrive in early 2022.

I'm pleased to announce that our Chapel will be the next worship space to be refreshed by the end of this month with new carpeting. Finally, the carpeting will also be replaced in the Upper Room.

Friends, as we prepare our building for worship, let us also prepare our hearts to worship God this day. I'm delighted to be leading today's service, along with my colleagues Mark Hovermale and Darlene Maginley. Carole Moon is here providing our music for us and she is being accompanied by her mother Sharon Smith. And so my gratitude goes to everyone for their involvement in bringing this service together today.

Let us now quiet ourselves before God as we turn to God in prayer.

## **Rev. Mark Hovermale — Opening Prayer**

Let us pray. Lord we come before you and we thank you for today. We thank you for the opportunity to praise your name and worship you. We pray that through song and learning and preaching and singing and praying that we bring glory to your name. We lift your name up, seeking to become closer to you and closer to each other, even as we watch online. Amen.

## **Carole Moon sings “Wonderful Words of Life” Accompanied by Sharon Smith on piano**

## **Darlene Maginley, Director of Children’s Ministry — Children’s Sermon**

Good morning, kids. In a few minutes Pastor Mark is going to come and read our scripture lesson for this morning. Today, our scripture talks about words. Now we all know how important words are. Words can turn a complete stranger into a best friend, and if we're not careful, words can turn a best friend into an enemy.

Sometimes we get so excited about hearing our own words that we forget to listen to someone else’s words. I think all of you can probably relate to talking in class when your teacher is trying to explain the directions for an assignment. It’s pretty important to listen to somebody else’s words at such a time.

There's also a verse in the Bible that says, “Be still and know that I am God.” God is telling us in that verse that it's important to listen to his words. So we're going to practice that right now, okay? So be very quiet and very still and let's listen.

*[Ms. Darlene listens but also checks her watch and looks to either side].*

I know I'm being silly up here but I think you get the point. It's hard to listen sometimes, isn't it? It’s especially hard to hear God's word because he's probably not going to come up and tap you on the shoulder and say, “Hi, it's me, God. Here’s what I want you to do!”

But I tell you--what if you start spending time in His word, the Bible, and you spend time talking to Him in prayer. Pretty soon you will find that you *can* hear God's voice. You can hear him when your heart and your brain tell you, “That's the wrong thing to do.” You can hear Him and other people who maybe have the same idea for something important or fun to do here at church or out in the world. You will find that God really does talk to you if you spend time in His Word, being quiet and listening for His Word.

Let's take a few minutes to talk to Him right now. Dear God, we thank you for words. We thank you for the Word of the Bible. We thank you for words that other people say to us that make us feel good or heal our broken hearts. We thank you for words that we can share with other people to heal their broken hearts Please help us to always guard our words so that our words are never painful or mean. Thank you very much for speaking to us when we take the time to listen. We ask your help in listening to your Word today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## **Rev. Hovermale – Scripture Readings**

### **Proverbs 16:24**

Gracious words are a honeycomb,  
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

### **Proverbs 21:23**

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues  
keep themselves from calamity.

### **Proverbs 26:20**

Without wood a fire goes out;  
without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

### **Proverbs 31:8-9**

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

## **Rev. Campbell – Sermon: “The Wisdom of Words and Silence”**

Would you all please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Many years ago I learned an important life lesson: Be careful what questions you ask! Now I learned this lesson while in primary school in Mulguy, Scotland. I was there serving as an assistant chaplain, which was part of my responsibility of being a minister within that community.

Thankfully as the assistant chaplain, I was only observing on that day. I had the opportunity to watch my esteemed colleague and mentor in ministry teach a class of seven and eight-year-olds on the importance of taming your tongue. He was basing his teaching on the New Testament book of James. There in chapter 3, at verse 7, there's a verse about how all kinds of wild animals, how sea creatures and birds, can all be tamed, but no human being can tame the tongue.

My friend and colleague made the mistake of asking these young children the question, “How do you know when your tongue is not tame?” Now I think he was looking for the response, you know that your tongue is not tame when it hurts people.

Instead the answer he received is that you know your tongue is not tame when it says bad words like, and then every bad word that you could possibly think of suddenly came out of this one student's mouth. As my chin literally dropped to the floor I think I actually may have learned some new words on that day. Suddenly, almost immediately, every child's hand in that class flew up in the hopes of providing additional words for us to listen to. Now I watched my colleague turn beet red and I was reminded through that lesson, and

this lesson has stayed with me throughout my ministry, be very careful what words you choose to use as you talk to others!

Well, the book of James is not the only place in the Bible that speaks of the danger of our words. The book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about what we say. In fact, Proverbs refers to our tongue, our mouth, and our lips over 150 times in just 31 chapters! Words are clearly very important!

According to researchers, on average, each of us open our mouths 700 times, using about 18,000 words, each and every single day. Now if we speak this much every single day, then each of us is bound to say things that may be considered not very “tame”. We may say words that have the potential to hurt others. This is *why* I suspect in Proverbs, chapter 17, it says, “The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint.”

Proverbs, chapter 21 at verse 23, also states, “Those who guard their mouths, and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.”

But what does all this teaching about regarding our words mean for each of us today? Is God calling us simply not to speak? Of course not! God is simply inviting us to choose our words wisely.

This fact is illustrated and highlighted for us by the writer of Proverbs. The writer suggests that one cannot gain wisdom until they fully grasp the power of words, for words have power within them. You see they can both inflict pain, or they can bring healing. Words can, as it says in the book of Proverbs, pierce like swords, leaving permanent scars, or words can actually feed our souls and bring refreshing water, needed medicine to our spirit. Now all of these images I've shared with you, of the sword, of the food, of the refreshing water, and medicine, all of these images are taken directly out of the book of Proverbs, in reference to our speech. Ultimately our words should always reflect the character of God. They should be truthful, gracious, loving, promoting healing and peace.

Proverbs, chapter 16 at verse 24, says, “Gracious words are like honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” Another one of my favorite verses from this Old Testament book says simply, “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.” In other words, honesty should stop our conversations; it should end any debate, because ultimately an honest word is the final word. Honesty reflects the heart and character of God and so it is that our words should be known for their honesty.

One biblical commentator has written, “We must be truthful if we are to be like God, for God cannot lie.” He always keeps his promises, He means exactly what he says and says exactly what he means. He cannot be inconsistent with himself. Jesus is truth Himself and ultimately we need to be very careful about saying anything if we are not 100% sure that it is truthful.

This is why, of course, the book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about our avoiding gossip. Gossip is not kind, and it is not always truthful. Being that it does not reflect the character of God, it is to be avoided. Proverbs 26, at verse 20, says this, “Without wood a fire goes down; without gossip, a quarrel dies down.” Gossip, you know, can be devastating to relationships. It not only fuels quarrels, it can act as a cancer within the body of Christ and if we are to be God's people today, then we are called in unity to work towards peace and not disruption.

Ultimately what comes out of our mouths reflects the condition of our hearts. This is the teaching of Jesus from the gospels. So let me ask you this, what do your words and what do my words say about the state of our hearts today? What would our family members say in response to that question? What would our colleagues say? What would our friends say? Are we angry or short tempered? Are we more prone to complain or criticize rather than praise or encourage?

Friends, after living with COVID these last 18 months, many of us are understandably finding our level of patience and our ability to maintain gentle healing conversations harder and harder. Remember our words reflect the condition of our hearts. As Christians, we long for hearts that reflect God's character and God's grace at work in the world today. So let me propose that when we find ourselves not particularly proud of what is coming out of our mouths, let us try leaning into experiences of silence for longer periods of time.

Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, says this,

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Even God practices silence at times. We always stop and wonder why God is silent, especially when we turn to God in prayer. But the witness of scripture suggests that in the silence God is working out His grace.

Isaiah, chapter 53, at verse 7, says of our Redeemer,

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Jesus chose to be silent in the face of punishment, to take on the burden of our sin willingly and completely. His silence brought about our forgiveness and the promise of everlasting life!

Friends we do not always understand why God is silent, but we can trust from the witness of scripture that God is working His purposes out. And so we also trust that in the silence God will speak to us.

You know, I have not been back that long from my extended study leave here at the church. At the very beginning of that study leave, in the early days of June, I went away on my own, on what I hoped would be a silent retreat, to simply listen to God speaking through His Word. I have to tell you, I found it incredibly difficult to be silent before God! I think I was simply out of practice of just being at peace. So it was hard not to be checking emails, and it was hard not to be looking at social media. It was hard not to play Candy Crush! It was hard not to find any distraction whatsoever, and simply be still and know that God was present, and that God wanted to speak.

Friends, in each of our lives we need to create these spaces and opportunities for God to speak to us where we are, about who we are, and what God is calling us and who God is calling us to be. There is grace to be found in the rhythm of silence and speech, and I pray that we would train our hearts to use words that reflect the character and nature of God today and always. May God help us in this holy endeavor. Amen.

## **Rev. Campbell — Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer**

Would you all please pray with me.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for gifting us with words of life, to teach us how to live. Please guide our words, we pray. May they forever reflect your heart and character. Dear Lord, where we struggle with our words please lead us into silence, and in your silence speak to us, we pray, about your will for our lives, in your world.

We praise you, dear God, that out of the rubble you are able to craft hope. We cling to this hope today for Haiti, for Afghanistan. From the brokenness of our world and the brokenness of our lives we pray for anyone who is in need throughout the world this day. We pray, dear God, that they would be lifted out of their distress by your Spirit's presence at work moving forward.

Dear God, help us, we pray, to trust in you. May we use our words to bring peace and healing and justice for others. We lift up our lives to you today and the concerns which weigh upon each of our hearts and minds. Help us, dear God, to turn these concerns over to you now.

Lord, you are always prepared to meet us in our time of need and so we come before you asking for your continued help and guidance and direction today. Please receive all of the prayers said here today in the strong name of Jesus Christ, your Son, who has taught us when we pray to say together,

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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

**Carole Moon sings, Hymn #477, "Come and Find the Quiet Center"  
Accompanied by Sharon Smith on piano**

## **Rev. Campbell — Benediction and Blessing**

Friends let us go from here today, ready to serve our Lord with our words, with our hearts, and with our lives. And as we go, may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forevermore. Amen.