



Prelude – Every Little Bit of Praise by The Royal Royal  
Welcome/Announcements (Fasting Survey)

### CALL TO WORSHIP | Isaiah 53:7-11

He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence.

Justice miscarried, and he was led off— and did anyone really know what was happening? He died without a thought for his own welfare, beaten bloody for the sins of my people.

They buried him with the wicked, threw him in a grave with a rich man, Even though he'd never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn't true.

Still, it's what God had in mind all along...Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant, will make many "righteous ones," as he himself carries the burden of their sins.

Song #1 – Before the Throne of God Above by Bancroft/Cook

Song #2 – Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor by Boswell/Papa

Dismiss Kids

### PRE-SERMON READING | Hosea 4:1-3

Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; *they break all bounds*, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

## SERMON |

Imagine living in a time when, in response to humanity's way of living, nature and all teeming life on and in the earth seems to mourn, its resiliency to rebound reduced, the patterns of weather and animal behavior frenzied, seemingly aggressive in anxious retort. Imagine living in a time when God is a curse or One who curses, a time when truth takes a backseat to opinion and passion, a time when zealous protecting of life, steady and social stewarding of life, and fidelity to the bounds necessary for life seem to be the least accurate descriptors of the day. Imagine living when the stories told are stories of ends of life, told to end life, or to foster fear and cultivate the anxiousness to control life before its end. Can you imagine living at a time like that? A time like the people Israel were living in when Hosea spoke on God's behalf the words \_\_\_\_\_ just read for us?

Oh, you thought I was talking about today, did you? Well, maybe our scriptures tell truer stories than we give them credit; stories true to our experience and not just the experience of ancients. Maybe, just maybe, these stories speak truth to who we are and the life we know more fundamentally than we are willing to admit, definitely more than we are eager to submit to, as is the testimony of our propensity to neuter them through hyper spiritualization and pious religiosity, dismissing their hyperbole as exaggeration rather than a wake-up call, and anachronizing their essential humanness.

No matter how foreign the ancient languages may feel, no matter how far removed we may be from the daily customs and culture of the authors and audience, these admittedly odd-to-us yet incredibly ordered stories speak directly and concretely to our everyday life in the land of the living even as they let us in on dimension of life often just out of sight. And the direct, concrete connection to our everyday attempts to make a life has been on full display in our meditation on the Ten Words.

The "decatalogue" (literally ten words) or "ten commandments," as we are more accustomed to calling them, are essential, elemental, in their revelation of what makes life work, and what does not. We live free or enslaved in our bounds, our relationship to God and one another and earth. When those relationships work, as we said last week, we prosper, even through the less-than-perfect circumstances of living. When those relationships don't work, we are impoverished—materially, spiritually, emotionally, societally, and more.

And there are few things more essential to relating than words. Words, as you might remember, are just as pivotal as deeds in creating, cultivating, making a life, good or otherwise:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. (Proverbs 18:21)

And everything in which you make, manufacture, construct your life—*in word* and actions—do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Colossians 3:17)

The Ninth Word is an acknowledgment of this truth.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Exodus 20:16)

Like the words immediately preceding it, the Ninth Word states the negative extreme of words' power. While words can heal and strengthen bonds, freeing others, they can also destroy bonds and imprison others.

In the Ninth Word's immediate context, the prohibition is against lying about another in a communal court; **speaking to others untruths for the purpose of condemning your neighbor**—presumably in an effort for the judge or (more commonly) the community to rule in your favor, to see you favorably.

Our propensity to speak about another in a way that gets what we desire (a favorable ruling, prestige, out of trouble, something that belongs to them, or even revenge (perhaps masked as justice)) led the nation of Israel to install regulations against **speech that corrupts judgment**:

You shall not go around as a *slanderer* among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life (blood) of your neighbor: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:16)

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

If *a malicious witness* arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges...

The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is *a false witness* and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge *the evil* from your midst.

And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. You shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deuteronomy 19:15-21)

Probably not the context we are used to hearing “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” is it? The statement of equitable judgment is not in the context of what has been taken, but, through our words, malicious and false witness, *what we are making efforts to take from our fellow humans*. And so, as the “rule of categories” contends, the Ninth Word condemns not only false testimony in a formal place of justice, but any speech that corrupts judgment—whether your own or someone else.

Speech that corrupts judgment is rather pervasive and includes speech we call:

#### CORRUPTING SPEECH

- Lying
- Slander
- Gossip
- "Othering"
- Stereotyping
- Exaggeration
- Assumptive Opinionating

- Lying...
- Slander (saying something untrue to damage reputation)

- Gossip (sharing information that may or may not be accurate, but is meant to influence the way of thinking of someone else) – “The words of a whisper are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.” (Prov. 18:8)

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- “othering” (Like the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:11-13, when you secure your own identity by distancing or stigmatizing someone else's identity)...
- Stereotyping (creating caricatures of others rather than contact with others)
- Exaggerating (stating something as better or worse than it really is)
- Assumptive Opinionating

I totally made that last one up. But saying what we think (or even feel) without consideration of what is actually true is foolish; at least, that’s what Proverbs says,

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion... A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are snares for his soul. (Proverbs 18:2,4)

Consider what that means for the words we speak and the words we consume daily.

### CORRUPTING SPEECH

- Lying
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- Gossip
- "Othering"
- Stereotyping
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- Assumptive Opinionating

How much of our ordinary conversing (with our spouses, coworkers, friends, etc.), typed conversations, read and reposted conversations, and podcasted, streamed, and watched conversations would fall under one of those descriptors?

There is an old Rabbinic quote<sup>1</sup> that says slander “kills three: the one who speaks it, the one about whom it is spoken, and the one who listens to it.” Again, as the proverbs remind us, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”

In case we missed it in regulation in Deuteronomy, or, as we are prone, dismissed the hyperbole, speaking falsely about another, **intending to corrupt others’ judgment to get what we want, is an “evil” that demands “purging,” eradication.**

While it is easy to see how that applies to the court system, how can there be justice without truth after all? Extrapolating the standard to the court of public opinion (whether in mass or a particular community) may feel a bit extreme. But remember how The Story begins. What is the action that leads to the breaking of bonds? It is not the false witness of the serpent, a lie that is essentially one speaking the heart of another whose heart is not his own.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Genesis 3:1-7)

The enemy did not lie about the command, only about the heart, intentions, presumptions, character, etc., of God. And **he did so to corrupt another’s judgment in his favor, for what he desired.** That is why Jesus would say to those who don’t see themselves in a place no longer in need of hearing the truth about God and themselves,

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:43-44)

If the Ninth Word prohibits corrupt speech, it is a directive to what? **The Ninth Word is a directive empowering us to speak the truth in love.**

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Philip Ryken, *Exodus*, 657.

“To love is to will the good of the other,” says Michael Novack. But he expounds that,

“Love is not sentimental, nor restful in illusions, but watchful, alert, and *ready to follow evidence*. It seeks the real as lungs crave air.”<sup>2</sup>

When we truly love ourselves, our neighbors, our enemies, and our God, we won’t rest in illusions but pursue truth as naturally, normally, and vigorously as we pursue breath. The apostle Paul helps us here, too, as he did with anger, fidelity, and taking responsibility,

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. **Tell your neighbor the truth.** In Christ’s body, we’re all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself...

Watch the way you talk. **Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.**

Don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for Himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted.

Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, over-the-top and slanderous talk. **Be gentle** with one another, **sensitive**. **Forgive one** another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:25-32)

When we love ourselves, our neighbors, our enemies, and our God; our speech has the power to make life good. It is kind and considerate, yes, but fit for the occasion (not too hard, nor too soft, but just right), seasoned with grace. Can we say that the words we use and we listen to fit that description?

## REFLECTION |

Allowing the Spirit to examine your heart in the words we use to make a life:

- In what ways do I use and consume language that corrupts judgment?
- How can my speech “fit the occasion,” building bonds, not breaking them?

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Arthur Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: how decent people can save America from the culture of contempt*, 13.

## COMMUNION INSTRUCTIONS |

Whether we are the originators or the consumers of speech that corrupts, often the heart of the matter is that our words are spoken in ignorant haste or arrogant apathy or from a place of hurt. The way we keep from speaking untruth, half-truth, or hateful truth, and speak in ways that make a good life, that fits the occasion (not too soft or too hard but just right), and is seasoned with grace; **is to remember and receive grace ourselves, the forgiveness for the ways we corrupt and are corrupted.**

After saying that we are dead in our sins—unable to make life wholly good, much less forever, in self-conceived ways—Jesus says that our sins don't have to be our end. When his **body would be broken**, Jesus said, **his life poured out**, sin ends, but life, true and forever life, begins. **"If you abide in my word," continued Jesus, "you are truly my disciples (ones learning life with me), and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** (John 8:31-32)

PLEASE STAND AND MAKE YOUR WAY DOWN TO RECEIVE THE COMMUNION ELEMENTS.

Song #3 – The Trinity Song by Sandra McCracken

## COMMUNION & TEN WORDS |

His body, broken for our sins. His life poured out as a forever promise to give what cannot be taken.

Because we abide in truth and the truth frees us to live life whole and holy with God and others, we say together the highlighted Ten Words:

Then God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from...the place of your slavery.

"Have no other gods.

"Make no images to serve.

"No twisting who I AM.

"Sabbath...and work.

"Honor others...especially those to whom you were given.

"Do not take life...protect and care for it.

"Do not break covenant...nurture it.

"Do not steal...steward.

"Do not lie about your neighbor...speak truth in love.

"Do not covet."

Song #4 – Great Is Our God by Young Oceans

Song #5 - He Is Among Us (The Least of These) by The Porter's Gate

## BENEDICTION | Zechariah 8:16-17

As we conclude the day made for us, we enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering that:

'And now here's what I want you to do: Tell the truth, the whole truth, when you speak. Do the right thing by one another, both personally and in your courts.'

Don't cook up plans to take unfair advantage of others. Don't do or say what isn't so. I hate all that stuff. Keep your lives simple and honest.' Decree of God.