



# Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## August 22, 2021

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "Give Thanks and Sing"

Arr. Binckes

### Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts! Our souls long for the courts of the Lord; our hearts and flesh rejoice in the living God.

**All: Happy are the people whose strength is in you! Whose hearts are set on the pilgrim's way.**

Liturgist: For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in our own room. Lord, your presence is better than life itself. You are strength to all in need, and hope to those who travel through sorrow.

**All: O Lord of hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you! For the Lord God is both sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory.**

*Psalm 84*

\* **All Singing: 565 "God Himself is With Us"**

\* GOD'S GREETING

\* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

\* **All Singing: 246 “God is Here”**

*Children ages 4–7 may come forward for a blessing before they leave for “Children in Worship.”*

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All: And also, with you.**

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: O Lord, who are we that you are mindful of us? We are embarrassed to come before you, for we have preferred the ways of this world to your ways, for we have rebelled against your wisdom.

**All: We are in trouble Lord. We reject your guidance. We confuse your face with the face of the world. We trust in our greed and pride instead of your love and grace.**

Liturgist: Hear us Lord as we pour our hearts out to you, confessing our selfish motives and wayward hearts.

**All: Incline your ear to our troubles Lord. For you alone are righteous and merciful.**  
*Daniel 9:4-19*

*Silent Confession and Lament*

**All Singing: 460 “Our Eyes Are Turned”**

Liturgist: The great mercy and forgiveness of God is found in the gift of the Son, Jesus Christ. It is in his name that we pray, for he is our Savior and mediator of the covenant of grace.

**All: We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ.**

Liturgist: We are justified by faith, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

**All: Let us boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.**

\* **All Singing: 252 “Church of God, Elect and Glorious”**  
*Singing verses 1 - 3*

## Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**All: Lord God, you have declared that your kingdom is among us. Open our eyes to see it, our ears to hear it, our hearts to hold it, our hands to serve it. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-32

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Talk the Walk

\* **All Singing: 904 “Lord, Make Us Servants”**

## Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

## Sending

BENEDICTION

\* **All Singing: 925 “Go to the World”**

Postlude:

### Worship Leaders

Organist:	Dora Diephouse	Acolyte:	Rowan Van Wyngarden
Pianist:	Erin Pacheco	Liturgist:	Gail Rice
Vocalist:	Jan Kosmal	Prayer:	Bob Rice
Violinist:	David VanderWeele		
Preacher:	Dave Larsen		

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Ephesians 4.29: Talk the Walk  
Dave Larsen

Some politicians, some pundits and, increasingly, course political discourse  
Movie screenplays  
Casual conversations overheard in shopping centers or at sporting events

The lexicon of language that surrounds our life is often a disgrace. Sometimes it's enough to make us run for cover. Or run to cover the ears of children. The older ones among us—and that includes me—recall parents using a bar of soap for a little mouth-washing, like the poor kid in the movie “Christmas Story” who let his language slip in imitation of his father.

The theme of our text focuses on unwholesome talk: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Foul language is one category of unwholesome talk. Another is the kind of talk that harms others not because the words are foul and polluted but because we intend to harm someone with them.

It's helpful to note that this isn't the first time in Ephesians 4 that the Apostle Paul talks about talk. In verse 15 he says this: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” For Paul, speaking the truth in love is a sign of spiritual maturity.

And in verse 25, Paul says this: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” Our language, Paul says, has everything to do with how we are to be joined together in the body of Christ. Talking the walk is a way to display belonging to each other in Christ.

Why should our words matter so much? What difference does it make? Why should Paul say to this young church at Ephesus, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”?

Here's why: Because our words can destroy others.

Because our words can harm the church.

Because our words can bless others.

Because our words can build the church.

Perhaps you've heard of or remember the movie “Mean Girls.” “Mean Girls” attempts to dissect and display the class system and tribalism of high school girls—the Queen Bees

and WannaBees—the Alphas and the Betas and the Gammas—who often use language and information and gossip to find acceptance or ensure rejection. It’s a brutal world, and much of it revolves around the kind of “unwholesome talk” that Paul describes in Ephesians 4.

The author of the book upon which “Mean Girls” is based reports that those who read the book tell her that they vividly recall their high school experiences. “Adult women still remember the names of the girls who made them feel bad,” she said. “One woman who was in her 80s told me, with tears in her eyes, about getting a letter signed by all the other girls in school that they did not want her coming back.” And some of the mean girls—after reading her book—wrote to tell her that they sent apologies for behavior and words they’ve felt bad about for years.

The power of words to build or destroy.

Now verbal abuse and bullying is not gender specific. Let’s make sure we understand this. An episode from my life remains a vivid memory. I was returning to our blacktop schoolyard for the daily after-school pick-up basketball game when he appeared around the corner. He looked for me often because I was easy pickings, a skinny kid compared to his bulk and strength. I knew what was coming because it had happened before. I’d probably take some verbal abuse, get slapped around a bit while his friends gathered around for a good laugh, and then he’d let me go.

This time he knocked the basketball from my hands, then spun me around and picked me up from the back, lifting me in the air and throwing me down. On his third lift—I don’t know what possessed me—I managed to hook my feet around his calves, lean back with all the force my frailty possessed, and as he lost his balance I landed on top of him. His head hit the blacktop with enough force to bring him to astonishment and tears. I tried not to look surprised. I know I smiled, picked up my basketball, and marched off as if I could go on to challenge the heavyweight champion of the world.

This childhood experience took place in the schoolyard of Englewood Christian School in Chicago when I was a junior high student. I’m sure that I was not the only victim of this bully, or that bullying began when I was in school. Perhaps bullying is as old as the ultimately violent sibling rivalry of Cain and Abel. Whatever its origin, it remains a problem at most schools. In its most primitive form, it’s physical force and violence. If verbalized it may focus on skin color, body size or shape, name-calling, the sound of a student’s voice, offensive sexual requests. In its latest, most technologically sophisticated form, it’s text messaging, tweeting, or voice mail to intimidate or threaten. *Newsweek* reported a British study that claimed one in four children in the United Kingdom was bullied by cell phone or internet.

I may have dumped my bully in the playground, but I still recall with regret finding my own ways to bully others—less physical and more verbal to be sure: the wisecracks and put-downs to elevate myself and humiliate others. I bullied with words.

“Mean Girls” and any study of bullying—male and female--shows what Paul is talking about: our words can destroy others. Or our words can bless others.

Fred Rogers, better known to the world as Mister Rogers, was an ordained Presbyterian minister committed to broadcasting God’s grace throughout the land. In his office he kept a sign that said, “Freddie, I like you just the way you are.” Those words were the words of his Grandfather Mc Feely, the source for the character Mr. Mc Feely. Admit it, you remember Mr. Mc Feely.

Mister Rogers described Grandpa Mc Feely as the kind of person who would say, “You know, you’ve made this a special day by being here.”

Now those are words that bless and not destroy. Roger’s prayer each day as he walked into his broadcast studio was simple: “God, let some word that is heard be Yours.”

So, our words can destroy others; our words can bless others. But in the context of Ephesians 4 Paul says something else: our words can harm the church. Our words can build the church.

Ephesians chapter four is one of the classic passages in the Bible that speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ.

What is this Biblical anatomy all about? What is the significance of the term **body**?

Some have imagined that Luke, the doctor, and missionary tent-maker Paul, companions as the book of Acts tells us, talking together when Luke may have said something about the young and growing churches they saw God planting through his ministry. Imagine, then, that Luke said to Paul: “You know Paul, the church is a lot like the body.”

Paul, then led by the Spirit, decided to use the image of the body in this letter which made the rounds to Ephesus and elsewhere. Paul even gets medically technical in the passage before us when he mentions joints and ligaments in verse 16.

In one sense it tells us that we are special—God’s special people. It’s a term for a distinct group and tells us that the church is more than a human organization. The church is a living organism. It is a body whose Head is Christ and whose members are individual Christians.

It is a special living organism because nothing can kill it. This body cannot die because the Head of the body is alive forever. The members of this body possess this everlasting life through faith in Christ, its Head.

Because the Body of Christ is a special living organism it survives with or without visible organization. It goes on and lives even when the body seems to be broken and shattered and persecuted as the body of Christ in China continues to live and will live forever, or when a Classis disagrees, or a Synod disappoints.

In our passage Paul says that this Body will grow. The growth Paul speaks about is simply this, nothing more, nothing less: knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus for who he is and what he has done, and living like we belong to him.

Paul tells us that we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. When he mentions the growth of the body in vs. 16, he means the same thing: the spiritual growth of the body as their communion with Christ strengthens and deepens.

Growth in the Body of Christ is not the same as numerical growth. We could have twice as many people here this morning and not be growing. We could have half as many and be growing like crazy. This is because growth in the Body of Christ is intense and internal. It has to do with our knowledge of Christ, our faith in him, and our moral practice. **Growth happens when each member is in a life-giving and life-stretching relationship with Jesus Christ.**

There are many diseases which can threaten the Body of Christ: Persecution. Apathy. Racism. Pride. To name just a few.

Our passage today points to a subtle but powerful enemy of the Body of Christ: unwholesome talk. If you look closely at Ephesians chapter four, which I would encourage you to do this week for your personal devotions, you'll notice that Paul writes often about our language, our speech, our talk, and its impact on the Body of Christ for good or ill. Listen to this quick listing.

Language that harms: falsehood, sinful anger, unwholesome talk, talk that destroys others, talk that harms others, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, deceitful and empty words.

Language that blesses: truth, anger that is helpful and productive, wholesome talk, talk that builds others up, talk that benefits others, pure language, wise talk, laughter that blesses, true and enriching words.

Paul later characterized the conversations that build the Body of Christ this way: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs . . . always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord." Does this mean that our conversations are to be limited to quoting praise songs and hymns? Impossible and highly unlikely!

But what if it's meant to suggest that our conversations are to be mini-worship services, filled with praise and truth and blessing? Can it mean that our words are to be like those that Christ would speak to us, and through us? Now, this is very likely. And this is how the Body of Christ is blessed and built.

A story is told about a pollster who was going door to door asking about what was wrong with the United States. At one house the pollster said: "Some say that the real problem in our country is ignorance and apathy. Do you agree?"

To which the person replied: “I don’t know, and I don’t care.”

This passage from Ephesians makes it harder for us to say: “I don’t know.” Ephesians 4 certainly gives us enough information and encouragement to think about the power of words and the potential for wholesome talk. This is more than a moralistic lesson. This is not finger-wagging or being sent to the principal’s office. This goes to the heart of the witness of the Body of Christ, who we are with each other and the witness we give to the world.

It's been widely noted that church membership across major evangelical denominations is in decline, especially among young adults. When surveyed, again and again, a refrain from them goes like this: The language of Christians belies their witness. There’s little about their talk that is admirable or attractive or sounds like the Jesus they claim to follow. They talk forgiveness and love, and then use words to condemn and destroy others, spouting falsehoods, pridefully lying. Thanks, Christianity, but no thanks.

Seminary professor Scott Hozee recently observed this about contemporary, everyday speech:

“Many key observers of our socio-political culture have noticed that in more recent times, we have been schooled by the language of some leaders as well as by our friends on social media not merely to disagree with someone with a different take on this or that issue. We are being taught we must hate those people. We don’t want to win an argument or score a thoughtful point for others to ponder. We want to bury our opponents, destroy them, hang them out and leave them for dead.

Bit by bit our language influences how we think. It’s never ‘just words.’ In these days of increasing hostility all around, we all need to ponder what our own speech is doing to ourselves and to our neighbors.

As the Heidelberg Catechism says in its commentary on the ninth commandment on lying, it is my duty to ‘guard and advance my neighbor’s good name.’ Language can accomplish that or not.”

Some politicians, some pundits and, increasingly, course political discourse  
 Movie screenplays  
 Casual conversations overheard in shopping centers or at sporting events

And to this list we might add:

After church parking lot or lobby conversations.  
 Bible study discussions.  
 Phone calls, texts, tweets, and email posts.  
 Family talk.

Friendship talk, and unfriending actions.  
School hallway or locker room talk.

As we talk—and listen—in the week ahead, remember that all are made in God’s image, that Christ died to save all, that we are to be Christ-like in our dealings with others, and that talking the walk is what Ephesians 4 encourages us to do.

**“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”**

The last moment of most worship services is God’s blessing of his people. He says “Goodbye” with good words as a reminder of his grace and an example of how we are to bless his world. The technical term is “benediction.” The meaning is “a good word.”

May your life and my life be filled with examples of benediction in the lives of others, here in this Body of Christ, and with those we meet.