

Sun., Feb. 28: [Pre-recorded and In-person]

Memory Verse: Psalm 19:14 “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Message: **Empty Words** -Pastor David

Sermon Scripture: Colossians 4:6; Isaiah 55:8-11; Psalm 19:14

Reading of Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-11

Blurb: Talk is cheap. Anyone can utter a promise, but it is the subsequent action that matters. It is easy to point out hypocrisy and lies in others, but what comes out of our own mouths? Are our words empty of meaning or do they bless, encourage, speak truth, and provide insight? It is time for us to watch our mouths.

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor Andrew

“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” -Psalm 19:14

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Humble

Raise A Hallelujah

PRAYERS -Pastor Andrew

[In-person Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Humble* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” -Psalm 19:14

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Whether the Word Be Preached or Read

Raise a Hallelujah

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 55:8-11 (CEB) -Reader: Sue LaVigne

The prophet Isaiah realizes that God’s thoughts and ways are far above ours. Notice how he declares that God’s Word always accomplishes what God intends.

Always! Isaiah 55:8-11,

8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

[In-person only] GROW MOMENT: Grow Groups Sign ups -Pastor David

[In-person only] SERVE MOMENT: St. Andrew’s Family Shelter meals -Pastor David

[In-person only] PRAYERS -Pastor Andrew

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: -Pastor Andrew with children.

MESSAGE: Empty Words

PP#1: Empty Words

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” -John 6:63

Empty. Empty Words. John 6:63, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.”

PP#2: *Images of some different kinds of face masks, some fun and creative.*

It was 11 months ago now that we first started wearing face masks. They’ve become a standard article of clothing, and now rank up there with wallet, keys and phone as the things you *always* carry with you. I’ve got masks in my coat, in my desk, in my pants pockets, in my car door, on my car visor, on the kitchen counter, by the front door of the house, and in the drier lint collector! For years to come we will find masks in the oddest places, and we’ll remember this time.

Masks have become a matter of fashion and design. You have to have a mask that matches your outfit, your mood, your personality. But even though we try to have fun with masks, without their benefit, we would rather not wear them. They are a nuisance: getting caught on your hear, your hair, earrings, hearing aids, glasses, ear microphones, ear pieces, and good old fashioned pencils

behind the ear! They also make it harder to breath...although over the last cold spell I didn't mind so much. Reese called her mask her "face coat," helping her stay warm! And masks make it harder to communicate. They muffle the sound we make when we speak, and they cover up facial expressions.

Masks are a nuisance because they do what they are supposed to do: they create a barrier over my mouth. It's so much easier, so much more freeing, without that barrier over our mouths.

In our Lenten journey to Easter this year our theme is Empty. We started with an empty chair for Jesus in our hearts. Last Sunday we emptied our lives so that we would have capacity to be filled by the Holy Spirit. And today we are looking at our empty words. Talk is cheap, and easy. But the Jesus we are following calls us to put our actions and behaviors where our mouths are.

Perhaps for us this Lent our face masks that we wear can also become a calling to holiness. Perhaps we can see them as a reminder for how to guard our words, just like we guard our breath.

PP#3: *Image of a person giving another person mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.*

Most of us speak our words using breath. And as I thought about this, it dawned on me that there is a powerful connection in the Bible between breath and words. At creation, God made all things by speaking words: "And God *said*, let there be light, and there was light." Now, God doesn't speak using physical air, but it is His spiritual breath that He breathed into the human He shaped from the clay, and that brought Adam to life. Genesis 2:7 says, "The Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life." Life, the process of breathing, is God's breath of life within us.

God's power is applied *as God speaks*. Whatever God says, happens. It has to, because His declaring it makes it happen. The prophet Isaiah records God saying, "*my word that goes out from my mouth*, it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) What God says, happens. Always.

PP#4: *Image of Jesus as Word of God from a page of the Bible hugging a woman*

Jesus—the Savior who is from God and who is Himself God—is introduced in the Gospel of John (do you remember John 1:1?) as "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1-4, 14).

Salvation is being restored to God, and it comes in the *message* of salvation: the Gospel proclaimed, heard, and taken to heart. Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." God's Word—God's power—coming in, produces faith within us, that we then exhale as faith-trust in Jesus. This, by the way, is why preaching must always be a crucial part of worship. No matter what people want in worship, the Gospel must be preached, as doing so unleashes the power of God's Word.

PP#5: Empty Words

1. God speaks

You know, the Gospel could be summarized as simply, “God speaks.” I mean, think about it: our God is a God who speaks! He starts off speaking right at the beginning, creating and bringing life. His speaking continues throughout history, recreating and restoring life. On the cross the Word of God speaks “It is finished!” At the end of the Bible, the very end, the same Word declares, “I am coming soon!” (Revelation 22:20). Our God is a speaking God. Think about that. Our God is not silent. He does not stay far off and keep His way of life hidden. He is not a mystery. He does not stay silent. Over and over again in the Bible God says, “If you see me you will find me!” (Deut. 4:29, Proverbs 8:17, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7) If you want to find God, you will!

Our God is a God who reveals Himself, asserts Himself, inserts Himself, into our lives. He doesn’t leave us stuck or on our own. He does not stay silent. He calls out, shouts out, “Come to me all you who are weary and heaven laden!” (Matt. 11:28) And God speaks into our lives. He unleashes His power over our sin and struggles, He speaks life into us, He changes us, gives us victory over whatever grips us by the throat. The one thing that you need to know as a struggling human in this weary world is that God speaks! Hallelujah!

We know what God thinks. God communicates! He’s far better than your enigma of a spouse, or your one-syllable teenager. God reveals Himself to us. We have a whole book with 800,000 of God’s words! If you want to know how to live, how to pursue holiness, what God wants from you, simply open it up. We’ve had it for thousands of years. Our problem is not that our God is silent. Our problem is that we don’t listen! We don’t go read. We choose to only hear what we want.

PP#6: Empty Words

1. God speaks
2. We speak to God

God breaths His breath of life into us, and we exhale faith in God. God speaks His Word of life into us, and we speak words of acceptance, thanksgiving and declaration. Romans 10:9 says that “If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.” We are created to be in conversation with God. We share words with God. Think about that! Among humans, we have to hold our tongues in the presence of authority. You don’t speak in the throne room! When the judge opens her mouth, we close ours. Children are to be seen and not heard, right? We do not speak, unless spoken to. But here’s the thing: we’ve been spoken to! God speaks! In the Garden of Eden, in the cool of the day, God came down to Adam and Eve to *speak WITH* them. Today we call that prayer! We speak *WITH* God! Every day! We don’t need a special audience. We don’t need to go somewhere. We can speak with God at any instant, because the Word of God is always right with us, indeed even inside us!

PP#7: Empty Words

1. God speaks
2. We speak to God
3. We speak for God

And this gets us to the very rub of our message today. We speak not just *to God*, but we speak *for God*. This blows my mind. I mean, we all know this. It’s obvious. But the very idea is crazy! God speaks His Word of life into us and we speak back to God in faith. But this is not just for us. God shares His Word with us *and through us*! 2 Corinthians 5:20, “We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.” God entrusts His powerful Words

into your mouth! That's a pretty hefty risk, right? I mean, would you give your hand grenade to a little kid? Why not? Because it is too powerful! And yet God entrusts His even more powerful Word to us.

PP#8: Proverbs 12:18 “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Proverbs 21:23 “Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.”

Ephesians 4:29 “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.”

James 1:26 “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.”

James 3:8 “But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

1 Peter 3:10 “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.”

Church, we need to change how we speak. We are too careless, too thoughtless, too reckless with God's Word. How we use our tongues, day by day, is part of our Christian discipleship.

I went looking in the Bible for passages that have to do with the words we speak. Oh, my goodness! God has a lot to say about what we say! God really, really cares about our words. Out of the hundreds, I put a couple of samples on the screen. The Bible talks most about God's love and salvation, but other main themes are the tongue, and money.

PP#9: Mouth-Masks

1. Filter our words

We wear masks to cover our mouths because we know that as far as airborne viruses go, what goes out also comes in, and what comes in also goes out. What a powerful reminder for us and our words! Let's look at three ways that our masks can help us change how we speak.

First of all, masks filter and create a barrier to control what comes in and what goes out of our mouths. This is a great image for our words. So much of what we let come into us is not life-giving. In our media culture today, we take off all censoring of what we listen to. Words of songs, movies, shows, social media, the language of those we are around, we let it all come in! Imagine negative words as a virus that can harm you! Why do we wear masks over our mouths and sunglasses to protect our eyes and mittens to protect our hands and muffs to protect our ears, but we demand there be no filtering of the words we let come into our hearts? A show with a plot line about sacking the next girl...well, it's entertaining. It makes me laugh. A movie showing explicit violence and abuse and taking God's name in vain...well, it's a blockbuster; can't miss that! A Facebook comment about that jerk who thinks a certain way...well, he deserves to be trolled and I'm justified in my nasty comment!

PP#10: *Image for “out of the mouth the heart speaks.”*

Jesus goes off on this a bit! Luke 6:43-45, “A good tree doesn't produce bad fruit, nor does a bad tree produce good fruit. 44 Each tree is known by its own fruit. People don't gather figs from thorny plants, nor do they pick grapes from prickly bushes. 45 A good person produces good from

the good treasury of the inner self, while an evil person produces evil from the evil treasury of the inner self. *The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart.*” What goes in, comes out! What we allow to nurture us, to shape us, to form us, that’s what comes out.

This is the Sixth Beatitude, right? “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” They will *converse* with God. They have a singular focus on God, and God purifies their hearts. And out of that purified heart the mouth speaks purified words of blessing.

The problem, Church, is that we really don’t believe that the bad words hanging in the air all around us, seep in! But one thing that COVID-19 has taught us is how contagious it can be! People who stay inside all day mysteriously contract COVID. The nasty words of our world seep in! Church, we need to mask up! We need to filter what we allow to come in. In fact, we’re supposed to double mask! We need to double down our word filtering, too!

PP#11: *Image for Colossians 4:6, including the verse.*

And that also goes for filtering what we let come out. We need to create barriers for what we will allow to come out of us. I was just talking to a couple of teens last month who told me of their surprise at how quickly and easily swear words came to mind and came out of their mouths. They’ve not been raised hearing that at home, and yet it comes so easily. There is a power in negative words, a negative energy, that seems to bring them to mind. And it just seeps in. Every disciple of Jesus in today’s culture must actively and consciously filter the sludge we live in.

But not just filtering out the bad words: we must fight that by actively speaking the good words. Colossians 4:6, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Are the words you release, through the filter of the Holy Spirit within you, are they filled with grace? Always? Not just *usually*. Not *most of the time*. Always? That’s our standard. Not just better than your coworker who has a trash mouth. We compare our mouths with Jesus’ mouth. Lent is a good time to double mask our words!

Jesus says in John 6:63, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” When we seek out Jesus’ words to fill us, then we have His words of life to speak. Let that sink in. You have God’s words of life to speak into others. That person who is freaking out, you have words of life to speak. That person who is angry and seeing red. You have words of life. That person who just offended you and makes you mad, who scored a shot against you, who took you down a peg. Your words—yes, right then, **ESPECIALLY** then—are to be words of life. When your spouse jumps on your last nerve, when your kid pushes your button, do you take off your mask and “let them have it!”?

PP#12: Psalm 19:14, “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Psalm 19:14 is a prayer that we should be praying continually. It’s a prayer about our words. It goes, “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” We offer to God our inner meditations, what we allow in, what we allow to settle and grow and define us. Only let stay, O God, what is pleasing to you! And then, out of that, may the words I speak please you!

Do they? If God were to record all your words throughout the day and then replay them for you at night, would you be surprised? Would God deem them “pleasing?” Lent is a great time to start filtering your mouth.

PP#13: Mouth-Masks

1. Filter our words
2. For the sake of others

If you are home alone, you can take your mask off, right? You're not in contact with others. But, when do you put your mask on? It's when you approach someone else, when you enter public quarters, when someone else enters your office. Even if we are healthy, we wear masks for the sake of others. What a great image for us! It's for the sake of others. We mask up our mouths when we encounter someone else. It's about them. We can bring about such blessing or pain by our words. This is all over the Proverbs. 12:25, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up." Again 15:4, "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life." 15:23, "A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!" 16:24, "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

Don't you want to be that person? Don't you want God to be able to touch that hurting, anxious, struggling person with words of life...the person who can speak words that bring healing right down to their inner bones of pain? Then you need to mask up your words! God is speaking through you. You may have the words that person needs. "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my Rock and Redeemer!"

PP#14: Mouth-Masks

1. Filter our words
2. For the sake of others
3. T.H.I.N.K. before you speak

So, as we journey in Lent, filtering our words, I want to suggest you put on the T.H.I.N.K. mask. If you have a spare mask in your pocket, get it out and hold it for a bit. Association will help this to really sink in.

We're going to commit to "Think before we speak." And T.H.I.N.K. is an acronym for how we are to filter our mouths.

PP#15: T.H.I.N.K. before you speak:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| T - Is it True? | H - Is it Helpful? | I - Is it Inspiring? |
| N - Is it Necessary? | K - Is it Kind? | |

T - Is it True? Don't just pass along your opinion, or the way you think it ought to be. Stick to what you know is true. This really helps curb the temptation to gossip. That is a deadly sin, you know, and strongly condemned in the Bible. God is truth, but Satan is the father of lies. Speak truth.

H - Is it Helpful? Is it what that person needs to hear? Or is it something that you just want to say. Most often we end up sharing what we want to say, rather than what we need to say. Big difference. Make it less about you and more about them. Does it build up or tear down? Ephesians 4:29 "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."

I - Is it Inspiring? Are they God's words? Do they hear God in your words? Remember, you are God's amplifier. Your filter should filter out the rest of the noise that the world puts in.

N - Is it Necessary? Gossip also can be telling true things that are not necessary. Passing along juicy tidbits that don't do anyone any good is a safe word to filter out.

PP#16: Image of WWII poster(s) captioned "Loose lips sink ships!"

A couple of years ago we were in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. In the WWII section I saw a poster that reminded everyone to keep a tight lip on military information, even on the street. “Loose lips sink ships!” Talking about things that seem harmless can inadvertently bring pain. Ask, is what I’m sharing necessary?

PP#17: T.H.I.N.K. before you speak:

T - Is it True?

H - Is it Helpful?

I - Is it Inspiring?

N - Is it Necessary?

K - Is it Kind?

K - Is it Kind? “Let your conversation be always full of grace.” My father taught me this one. He put it this way, “If you can’t say anything kind, . . .” What was it? [Don’t say anything at all!] Oh, he told you, too, did he? It’s a common proverb, but what a whopping truth, right? We know it. Now, we just have to live it!

PP#18: Empty Words

1. God speaks

2. We speak to God

3. We speak for God (T.H.I.N.K.)

Jesus says in Matthew 12:36, “I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.” Wow! Sobering! This is the Jesus we are following. And so, I think it’s time to filter out our empty words. He is the Word of God. God is speaking *to you* and *through you*. His Holy Spirit purifies you from the inside out! It’s time to speak full words, words full of life. These next five weeks, every time we put on our face masks, let’s make a special point to also put on our mouth masks, and T.H.I.N.K before we speak!

Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *Words* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God’s work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the “square” on the bulletin.

[Recorded only] GROW MOMENT: Grow Groups Sign ups -Pastor David

[Recorded only] SERVE MOMENT: St. Andrew’s Family Shelter meals -Pastor David

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Next Sunday: Empty Tanks -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” -Psalm 19:14

BENEDICTION -Pastor David