

Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 59:20-21

New Testament lesson: John 14:8-17

Who are the top 10 best role models for kids? If you ask Google, topping your list would be Taylor Swift. According to one on-online comment “Taylor is a good role model (because) she teaches little kids to stand up against bullying in her song ‘Mean.’” It begins talking about people who use words as if they were knives and swords and weapons. Let’s listen to a bit of the song. (*play video* → 1:06)

As Taylor Swift says in her song, too many people use words and other forms of bullying to hurt people. But words can also be used to heal.

You’ll be glad to know that Jesus also made the Top 10 list of best role models, as did parents. In fact, according to one study of religious faith, the person who has the most positive influence on religious faith is mom.¹ Happy Mother’s Day all you moms and mom-like nurturers!

Jesus was a mom-like nurturer. With all the talk of Jesus the Son and God the Father, what the Bible is really talking about is parental love -motherly love- and child-like devotion.

In today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus has just told his closest disciples that he is leaving them to go to God, whom he calls the Father and whom we know as a loving, nurturing parent.

Look at how tenderly Jesus deals with the disciples’ concerns. Hearing that Jesus is going to the Father, Philip says, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus says to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Can’t you just hear Jesus saying that – “Have I been with you all this time ... and you still do not know me,” and “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” Can you hear Jesus saying that?

How do you hear Jesus saying that? Do you suppose he said it with a tone of anger and indignation, like: “Have I been with you all this time ... and you still do not know me.... How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” Or would Jesus say it more tenderly, like, “Have I been with you all this time ... and you still do not know me.... How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”

The Jesus I know has a tender heart, like a loving mother or father, aunt or uncle, grand or great-grand.

Today’s sermon is about the words we say and the way we say them.

¹ See National and International Religion Report, 4 (12 March 1990).

In reassuring the disciples about his departure, Jesus says, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

Here, Jesus is equating the word of God with the work of God. The Bible is the Living Word of God; Jesus is the Word of God made flesh; and the Holy Spirit puts God’s word in our hearts.

We have kind and tender words inside us. We know this because God put them there. Or as it says in Isaiah 59 which we heard read today, the Lord’s “spirit that is upon you, and (his) words that (God has) put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth.” They’re in us, now and forever – and in our children and our children’s children – to be used for the good, of us and all people. God’s word is in us ready to come out in any situation – a word of encouragement, a word of hope, words of forgiveness and reconciliation, acceptance and affirmation – tender words that we are called to apply like a healing balm in any troubling situation.

The fact that these words are not the words that always come out of our mouths is not God’s fault, but ours. It’s the fault of the world around us, what we’ve made of it, and how we’ve allowed it into our hearts, stuffing down the loving and nurturing words that God has put in us.

God has promised us and all people that words of healing, hope, peace and joy are still in us, always in us. The best way for us – for you – to ensure that God’s words of nurture are what come out of your mouth is to surround yourself with people who are loving and nurturing. That’s how we get in the habit of being loving and nurturing ourselves.

Now this doesn’t necessarily mean we separate ourselves from friends and family who are less than loving in their words and actions. But we certainly don’t respond in kind – with negative and hurtful speech or actions.

The best thing to do when a situation gets ugly is to take a breath, step away, regroup, and think of a positive, supportive way of responding. Jesus changed the world with his words! And the living word of God is here for us so that we might change the world with our words – God’s word taking God’s word and using it to work miracles in our lives and in our world. We can do it!

Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ... And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.

The Spirit of truth – the Spirit of God – lives in us, equipping us with the words to say and the actions to take that will heal this world and strengthen our relationships. It won’t be easy – God knows it’s not easy. Jesus says, “The world cannot accept (the Spirit of truth – the Word of God) because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him,” says Jesus, “for he lives with you and will be in you” – God’s Spirit, God’s word in you.

There is an old saying from the world of human resources management: “Hurt people hurt people.” In other words, beneath the surface of a bully, a complainer, or a person who makes life difficult, there is a deeply wounded person. The way to deal with such a person is to find a way to ease the hurt, heal the wound, acknowledge and relieve the pain.

You have the words to say. That’s God’s promise – God’s gift to you – to all of us. If you and I make the conscious effort to choose the words God has put in us – instead of what the world has put in us – we, too, can do the work of the Lord – the nurturing, healing, uplifting, and peace-making work of the Lord. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, in your eternal and divine wisdom you made us for relationship, and we celebrate the people you have brought into our lives, especially our mothers.

For all those who teach us to love, we praise you.
For those who inspire us to be generous, just and kind, we thank you. For those who nurture our relationship with you, we rejoice.

And, for those who disappoint us, we ask for grace to be compassionate and forgiving. In all our relationships may we live the truth of your love for us, which knows no bounds.

We thank you for your loving presence with us, and for your comforting, healing presence with those who grieve the loss of a loved one, those who are battling disease and illness, and those whose pain and suffering is caused by others. Send them – and us – your Spirit of peace and healing and reconciliation.

For with you, O Lord, there is love and wholeness and reassurance. We see that in your words and actions, and we see that in the prayer that you gave to us, that we might pray together, saying:

**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.**