Tongues and Pens and Keyboards

Psalm 34:11-14, Mark 13:1-8

Buckingham Church

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“Do you love life? Do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?” That’s the Common English Bible translation of Psalm 34 verse 12. Sounds like an advertising slogan, doesn’t it? You kind of expect that the images that would go with it are fast cars, beautiful clothes, and a diamond necklace!

What a surprise, then, and maybe a bit of a letdown, that the next words are “then you must keep your tongue from evil and keep your lips from speaking lies! Turn away from evil! Do good! Seek peace and go after it!!” Disappointing in an ad, maybe, but I can’t imagine too many things that would have more of a chance of changing the world for good than working on how we speak and how we listen ourselves into speech. In fact, I believe that this church which today we will pledge to support for another year, and every church has a crucial role too often neglected in our times to be a place to teach people to listen and speak in another language. I don’t believe this is meant to be a second language, but the first language, the language that underlies whatever other language we use in the world. It’s the language of love, breathed into us at Creation. This love language is not Valentine’s poems or romantic songs. I mean the love that has the power to overcome the hate and hurt we hear spoken and typed and texted and posted and tweeted and sung and shouted all over the place these days. We are a school to teach love as a first language, love of God, of each other, and of the earth, and I really think we need to step it up.

Why? Think about it for two minutes and you know. Look at any social media feed and you know. Listen to the news for five minutes and you know. If you are a person of color or LGBTQ, you really know. It has become utterly acceptable, it seems, to throw around hate, to speak outright lies without a second thought, to seek violence and pursue it. (Danvers, Mass hockey team story)

Learning a language begins with listening. Jesus tells his disciples that after he is gone lots of people will talk lots of trash and lies about him, about God, predicting futures about which they know nothing. They will try to lead people astray with false information for their own gain. He tells them to be careful who they listen to. To tune their ears to his words in their hearing memories. To tune their ears to the frequency of love and hope and truth and right. To listen carefully to discern what is behind any words they hear: is it the language of love or of destructive hurt and hate?

This listening stuff is so hard when we have so many words coming at us from so many kinds of media and so little silence in our days. When we are urged to react rather than reflect, to move rather than consider motivation.

There’s a kind of singing called “overtone singing,” done by several peoples around the world, most prominently Mongolian peoples. This is what it sounds like (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtbsb3swbcU). That’s one person. You can hear if you listen very carefully that there is a drone note that keeps going while there are other notes sung on top of it, by one person, not overdubbed. Cool, huh?

What I think the scriptures are trying to tell us often is that we need to pay attention when we listen to hear the drone note, the undertone, the note that keeps the song centered and true, beneath any words we hear, and evaluate how that undertone sings with love. If we hear undertones of love, we can be more trustful of the overtone words.

Then, we need to be aware of what the undertone is in our **own** speech. When people listen to us, what language are they hearing as the undertone? Is it the love to which God has called us? We don’t have to say “God” to show that love, and indeed some people who say the word “God” an awful lot do not do so in the language of love. And are we taking time to consider what we say, post, tweet, or text before we do so and how it might be heard or read? Or are we merely reacting, re-tweeting, re-posting someone else’s words without considering closely their undertone? Do we ever take time to think back on what we have said or written in any given day, and how it has caused harm or good? Because an awful lot of harm is being done right now in the world by words with the undertone of hurt, hate and lies.

Today we are looking toward 2022, which will be upon us before we know it. We are a small congregation, so there are things we cannot do in the new year, but there is much we can. How can we become a place where all of us learn, re-learn, and practice our first language, that language of divine love breathed into us by our Creator? We don’t need fancy stuff or lots of people to do that. We need each other, and the trust to hold each other accountable to a higher standard than the meta-verse or the locker room or the office or the coffee shop, or sometimes even members of our families. Can we be a listening lab, a language lab? Can we listen ourselves into speaking good, truth, and love, not just seeking peace, but chasing after it? And can we urge each other to practice this language everywhere we go or read or type or speak every day? That’s a church well worth our support in any way we can. Because God and the times in which we live are calling us to do so with some very real urgency. Amen.