



“Words to Bless and Heal”
Sermon by Rev. David D. Colby
Isaiah 40:28-31 and Matthew 11:28-29

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In 1965, the Chicago Tribune ran an article that included words that are now a rather common quote. Here's the longer excerpt:

Most of us are acutely aware of our own struggles and we are preoccupied with our own problems. We sympathize with ourselves because we see our own difficulties so clearly. But Ian McLaren noted wisely, "Let us be kind to one another, for most of us are fighting a hard battle."

We know what brings us joy and what preoccupies our hearts. But when we look at others, it is helpful to remember that about their circumstances, we just do not know. When we look someone else in the face, we just cannot know, cannot comprehend all that they are going through. And so it is a good teaching, to assume that those we encounter have their own difficulties and are in need of kindness. "Be kind, for everyone is fighting hard battles."

Some people can look so strong, so well-put together. Like they have life completely figured out. But as the prophet

Isaiah suggested so long ago, "even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted" (Isaiah 40:30).

Life is difficult, sometimes unpredictable. And we need all the support we can get. And so we need music. And friends. And the support of family. So thank you to VocalPoint.

When I was growing up, I was often told another saying that goes like this. "Sticks and stones might break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Do we still teach this to kids? I am glad to know that this quote has fallen out of favor, because it is simply not true. I suppose that what that proverb was trying to do was to build up our strength, to build up resistance, to prepare kids that hurtful words might be hurled their way and that we must do what we can to keep them from hurting us. But my experience has been that words can hurt. As much as a physical injury. Words can cut and twist and leave us wondering why.

We can absorb cruelties. Some intentional. Some words aimed our way that were intended to hurt.

This week National Coming Out Day - the 30th annual such event - was celebrated. And while there is more and more acceptance - and that is a good thing - I heard stories from friends about the words that they endured, the barbed words that found their mark. And how years later cruel words are remembered and how we can still hear the laughter between bullies having fun at our expense. Words can be used to hurt.

And sometimes, if we are honest, it is us who do the hurting through the words that somehow just come out of our mouths. Sometimes intentional - and for that may we find forgiveness and ways to make amends. And sometimes, even as we say them we realize that they were a mistake and try as we might to pull them back, once spoken they take on a life of their own.

As the story in Children's Time describes, words are powerful. Words can hurt and damage, but words and can be used to bless and heal. The words that lead to healing laughter. The words that make up stories that help us to understand. The words used to express kindness and love.

In the Bible, words are powerful. God speaks and the world is created. Prophets use words to rage against injustice and oppression, and different words offer hope and remind people of God's promise. With their utterance, blessings are passed down from generation to generation.

It is so tempting to want a quick, easy to follow "how-to" list for happiness. But life

does not lend itself to a cookie cutter approach. What do we need?

We need a sense of perspective - an appreciation both for the vastness of this world and a sense that our specific lives have meaning and importance. We need people who care for us. People who wonder how we are doing and follow-up. We need people with whom to celebrate and rejoice and have fun. We need to participate in things that are bigger than just ourselves. These are some of the reasons that VocalPoint is such a great opportunity that benefits those who sing, and also those who will gather in February for the concerts.

And we will, occasionally, need trained helpers. Brene Brown, a researcher who has done work on the impact of shame, writes,

"Don't get me wrong, I'd love to skip over the hard stuff, but it just doesn't work. We don't change, we don't grow, and we don't move forward without the work. If we really want to live a joyful, connected, and meaningful life, we must talk about things that get in the way."

And so on a day like today it is important to say that we Counselors and therapists can play an important role in our healing and wholeness.

We will be hearing from Mary Weeks in a minute or two about the work of the Walk-In Counseling Center, the beneficiary organization selected for the 2018-19 VocalPoint season. In an article about their mission, one of the clinic directors said,

"It's important so say that the people who come here are just like anyone else," she said. "We

all suffer. We all can benefit from therapy. Some people come here with relationship issues or concerns like, 'I'm struggling with anxiety or depression.' Lots of people come in with histories of trauma. People come in with substance abuse. Some people come in who have been diagnosed with a more significant mental health difficulty like schizophrenia or bipolar. They'll say, 'Oh, my gosh. I'm terrified. What is going on with me?' Or, 'I've had this diagnosis for a long time. I have lots of people working with me. I just need someone to talk to right now.'

We trust in the power of the spoken word. We gather to sing words composed by others when music is what we most need. We need people who will listen when the words that re-member us must be shared and heard.

Words that can bless and heal. May it be so. Amen.

¹ I found this longer context as I was searching for the source of this frequently heard quote sometimes attributed to Plato. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/06/29/be-kind/>

² The form that this quote takes in the movie, *Wonder*.

³ Today was the kickoff Sunday for the 8th season of VocalPoint community chorus. See www.vocalpointchorus.org

⁴ I read Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's *When God Gave Us Words* (Louisville, Flyaway Books, 2018).

⁵ Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Minnesota, Hazelden Publishing, 2010) 35.

⁶ www.walkin.org

⁷ Andy Steiner, "After 45 Years, Walk-In Counseling still offers free therapy to all comers," 4 February, 2015 in MinnPost, archived on the www.walkin.org website.