

Call to Worship

Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. (Ps 111:2)

Worship in song: by W Kethe

1. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell; Come ye before Him and rejoice.
2. The Lord, ye know, is God indeed; without our aid He did us make;
We are his folk, He doth us feed; and for His sheep He doth us take.
3. O enter then His gates with praise; approach with joy His courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless His name always, for it is seemly so to do.
4. For why? The Lord our God is good; His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 90:1-12

Prayer of confession

Lord, we want to say, "we love you" and that our heart's desire is to do your will,
but our sinfulness betrays us and shows us the values we have truly chosen.
Harsh words and abuse spring from our impure thoughts.
Indifference to the hurts of others spring from our self-interest.
Criticism and failing to forgive spring from our self-righteousness.

Loving Lord, we lay our sins at the foot of the cross and ask your forgiveness.

Renew us with your righteousness, that our hearts may be:

- full of love for you;
- full of your vision for the future;
- and full of the courage to pursue it. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Pet 3:18)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving God, this is our boast about you:

The lost can't lose you; The blind can't miss you; The frightened can't outrun you.
The weak can't elude you; Despots can't erase you; Cynics can't dismiss you.
Critics can't destroy you; Academics can't define you.

Speak God's Truth

The strong can't beat you; The revisionist can't revise you.
The atheist can't delete you; The sinful can't avoid you.
None of us can escape you. And we are grateful for you.

The Bible Reading

- Ephesians 4:11-16

The Message: **SPEAK GOD'S TRUTH**

We are called to speak life to a dying world. Do it, and do it well.

The world is not doing very well without Jesus. No one does very well without Jesus. Fortunately for the world, God has placed within it you and me who have knowledge about the one they need. And it is the mandate of each of us who comprise God's church to speak this out. This is the reason we exist. We are to speak it out amidst the lies, distractions and confusions of a dying world. God calls you and me to be the light and hope of the world (Mt 5:14-16).

It is as if you are standing with Ezekiel gazing across a wide valley filled with lifeless, dry bones. God is saying to you, "Speak my life into these dry bones and make them live" (Ezek 37:1-6). You have the words that bring life, within you. What will you do?

Not only are we to tell people about the hope that Jesus gives, we have to do this beautifully, with grace and care. The Apostle Peter says, "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*" (1 Pet 3:15). This is also taught in Proverbs, "*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver*" (Prov 25:11). The "*apples of gold*" are the helpful things we say. The "*settings of silver*" are the way we say it.

The apostle Paul, one of the world's greatest evangelists says, "*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer people*" (Col 4:6). In Paul's time, salt was a symbol of purity and value. In fact, our word 'salary' comes from the word 'salt'. Salt also preserved what was good and brought out the best flavours. We are to do the same when we speak God's truth.

God is a God of truth

God desires truth from us who are his children. The Psalmist writes about God saying: "*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts*" (Ps 51:6). Truth is the very nature of God's will. In the Psalms, God is called the "*God of truth*" (Ps 31:5). Truth is a quality that belongs to God and derives from God.

Jesus is recorded as introducing his teaching with the phrase "*I tell you the truth*" over eighty times in the gospels. Truth is vitally important. Nothing other than truth is worthy of God, worthy of you or worthy of others.

Truth is not just the opposite of error, it is something worthy of personal commitment. Truth requires us to make a judgement, then live it out by what we do. Truth is not just something you give intellectual assent to. It requires action. The Psalmist says: "*I have*

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chosen the way of truth" (Ps 119:30).¹ The apostle John says: *"let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth"* (1 Jn 3:18).

Problems inevitably arise when God's truth is ignored. This is because faithfulness to God's truth, and morality, are inseparably linked (Is 59:12-15; Jer 7:28; 9:4-6). The prophet Daniel writes, *"Because of rebellion (against God), ...truth was thrown to the ground"* (Dan 8:12).

So, will you choose truth to be a fundamental value for yourself that you will never violate?

Speak truth to yourself

Decide now, to speak truth to yourself. The theologian and pastoral carer, Henri Nouwen writes:

"I have come to realise that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity or power but self rejection. ... Self rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "Beloved..."

*That voice has always been there, but it seems that I was much more eager to listen to other louder voices saying: "Prove that you are worth something; do something relevant, spectacular or powerful, and then you will earn the love you so desire."*²

What you say is important for it reflects the state of your heart. Jesus said: *"For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks"* (Lk 6:45). Therefore, take control of what you say about yourself. Whilst you should be realistic about yourself, you should not be negative or speak negativity to yourself. What you think about yourself is important because you tend to become what you think you are. The Bible says: *"For what he thinks is what he really is."*(Prov 23:7 Revised Good News version).

Be a person who is "stable". Know the truth of who you are and the value of who you are. It is often the "unstable" that are most easily seduced by untruth (2 Pet 2:14). Therefore:

- know who you are (Eph 1:3-20)
- believe and do what God's word says (Jas 1:23-24) – for this confers stability.

Speak God's truth to others

God has chosen you to speak his truth to a world in sore need of it. It is God's way to allow ordinary people like you and me to carry his truth. Paul speaks of God choosing to put his treasure into common old clay pots – us (2 Cor 4:5-7). In this way, people will see that what we have does not come from us but from God.

Jesus makes it plain in Acts 1:8 that each of us are to be his witnesses. The mystery of Christ has been revealed to us the church, and it is God's will that we make him known to the rest of the world (Eph 3:7-11). Paul teaches that the *"fragrance of Christ"* is spread by us (2 Cor 2:14).

¹ The Hebrew word for truth used in the Old Testament is *emeth* or *emunah*, meaning faithfulness, truth, soundness, justice, and constancy. The verb *aman* (meaning confirm or trust) finds its way in today's language as the word "amen".

² Henri Nouwen *Life of the Beloved* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) pp.27-29.

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It is important that we speak nothing other than God's truth. We have no right to speak anything else other than the truth that God has revealed (2 Tim 2:15). The Bible gives us some guidelines on how to do this from Scripture:

- We are not to quote the Bible out of context. Satan quoted Ps 91:12 out of context in order to try and get his own way (Lk 4:9-11).
- We are to use the Bible properly (Jer 8:8; 2 Tim 2:15).
- We are not to distort Scripture (2 Pet 3:15-16)
- We are not to add or subtract anything to Scripture (Rev 22:18-19).

We should note the passion of the Apostle Paul to teach the word of God in *all* its fullness (Col 1:25). Let's do the same.

Speaking God's truth will not always be easy. Patricia Waugh, (Professor of English at Durham University) writes: *"In (our postmodern world), consciousness is adrift, unable to anchor itself to any universal ground of justice truth or reason."*³ Some people have despaired of ever finding true truth. Note Pilate's cynical comment *"What is truth?"* (Jn 18:36). I wonder whether you could you have answered him?

We need to understand that there is a plethora of competing truth claims all clamouring for people's allegiance. This should not surprise you. Satan is a deceiver, and one of the things he does is to peddle lies. The Bible warns that some will choose to seek academic understanding in order to become spiritually elite, but will reject God's truth. The apostle Paul writes that there will be those who are, *"swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth"* (2 Tim 3:7). He also warns, *"For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear"* (2 Tim 4:3).

You are not alone when you search for truth. God's Holy Spirit will guide you. Jesus said: *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth"* (Jn 16:13)⁴ God's Holy Spirit will also give you the ability to speak to others about God when the need arises (Mt 10:19-20).

So, let our goal be to speak the truth in love and to grow up to be like Christ. Paul says: *"Then we will be no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* (Eph 4:14-16).

What will you say to those who cry, *"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are cut off"* (Ezek 37:11). The words of God within you are their only hope. These are the words that can bring life. What will you do?

Will you speak God's truth?

³ Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism: A Reader*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1992) p.2.

⁴ See also: 1 Cor 2:13

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Hymn: *by Charles Wesley*

1. Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!
2. Jesus, the Saviour, reigns, the God of truth and love;
When He had purged our stains He took His seat above;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!
3. He sits at God's right hand till all His foes submit,
And bow to His command, and fall beneath His feet:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. (Phil 4:8)

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Dr Nick Hawkes (2022)

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

Money is dangerous!

1 Timothy 6:6-10

You will need:

Find a small box and cover it with warning stickers saying "Danger", "Beware", "Handle with Care". Put a \$20 note inside (or whatever you can afford!).

Tell the children you have something very dangerous inside the box, can they guess what it is. Feel free to ham it up a bit and throw out clues occasionally, e.g.

- If this bites, it can ruin your entire life.
- It is massively addictive.
- It can change your whole personality.
- It can wreck your honesty.
- It can stop you living like Jesus.
- It can make you die of exhaustion.

Eventually, open up the box and show them the money.

Tell the story of Gollum in the Lord of the Rings:

Gollum found a golden ring that gave great power to the person who had it. Unfortunately, it also had the power to turn the person who had the gold ring into someone who was bad and evil. Gollum was once a nice Hobbit called Smeagol, but finding the ring turned him into an ugly, evil person.

(Use the website to print off pictures of Gollum if you can.)

Ask the children what is good about money:

- It enables us to eat, live and be clothed properly.
- We can give it to help those who are less well off.
- We can use it to employ people to lead us in our work for God.

Ask the children what is dangerous about money:

- It can make us greedy so we always want more and more and more and more.
- It can make us selfish so we don't care about others.
- It can make us rely on money and not on God.
- It can make us so busy earning money that we do no work for God.
- It can make us weary because we spend most of our time trying to get more.
- It can tempt us to be dishonest so we can get more money.

Older Children

For Older Children you might like to tell the story of "Duke" Cunningham:

Randy "Duke" Cunningham, was a fighter ace who fought in the Vietnam war. Cunningham was the inspiration for the character portrayed in the film *Top Gun*. Once he flew upside down close to the top of a Mig fighter to frighten it away. However, although he already had a lot of money, his greed for more money led him to accept 2.4 million American dollars in bribes when he was a congressman in the American House of Representatives. When this was discovered in January, 2006, Mr. Cunningham turned from being a national hero to being a national disgrace.

Read 1 Tim 6:6-10 and teach its meaning. (Paraphrase it in simple language for younger children.)

Ask the children to be careful not to love money too much. If they learn to give some of their money away wisely to those who need it, it shows that they are the boss of their money and that money is not the boss of them.