

**SERMON**  
**“Words Create Worlds”**  
**Genesis 1:1-31**  
**Sunday, January 10, 2021**

One of the first cameras my wife and I ever owned was a camera that talked. With a feminine sounding voice like that of Alexa, the camera would say things like: “It’s too dark. Use your flash,” “You’re too close. Step back,” “You’re too far away. Get closer.”

At first, I thought it was cool to have a camera that could talk... but it soon became a nuisance. I found myself talking back to it: “I know I’m too far but I want the picture anyway,” “Look I may be too close but there’s no room for me to step back.”

Of course, the camera couldn’t hear me...it wasn’t sentient or all-knowing; but it would talk back to me: “I said once already that you are too close.”

“I know I am too close,” I would scream back, “but I want the picture anyway! Now shut up!”

Imagine the embarrassment I would experience when after taking the picture I turned around only to find people staring at me as if I was a psychopath. I could sense them questioning: “Who is this crazy guy screaming at nobody?”

In defense of myself I would utter; “It’s my camera...she’s talking to me.”

The looks on their faces were like: “Yeah? Sure?”

Like that camera trying to help me to take the snapshot that would create the perfect picture; the book of Genesis gives us a snapshot of creation that helps us to see how perfectly God created. When Genesis 1:2 tells us “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep;” an image of swirling gas or liquid instantly forms on the lens of my imagination. The poet James Weldon Johnson captured this well when he wrote:

*“As far as the eye of God could see  
Darkness covered everything  
Blacker than a hundred midnights  
Down in a cypress swamp.”*

Genesis then continues to describe what God does with that swirling chaos: “a wind from God swept over the face of the water.” The Hebrew word for “wind” is *ruah* which can also be translated “spirit” or “breath.” Homiletics reminds us that this word is the same word used when God’s spirit blew like a mighty wind upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost; or, as in the case of John 20:22, a gentle breath, when the Resurrected Christ, breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Wind, spirit, breath; all three are important words, at the heart of God’s creative work.

On the first day, God created the powerful light that is absolutely essential for life, and God did it using nothing but four words, “Let there be light.” God used a set of words to bring order out of chaos and light out of darkness. This creative speech of God has continued throughout history, through the words of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Again, just as my camera helped me to create a perfect picture so God, through the use of Words, created worlds.

In the novel *City of Peace*, a Methodist pastor named Harley Camden speaks about the power of words. “I’m convinced that words create reality,” Harley explains. “It’s a very biblical idea. Think of God creating the world in Genesis, saying ‘Let there be light,’ and there is light. Jesus is described in the New Testament as ‘the Word.’ When Martin Luther King Jr., said, ‘I have a dream,’ people began to see a vision of a new world of equality. Words create reality. Whether we say ‘I love you’ or ‘I hate you’ makes a huge difference.”

“Words,” says Homiletics, “have always been critical to the creative work of God.” Throughout this first chapter in the book of Genesis God speaks and life itself comes into being: earth and seas, vegetation, birds, cattle, and finally humankind. At the end of this creative work, we hear this affirmation of the creation: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Jack Hayford, in his book *The Power of Words*, tells of the time he counseled a man who was facing a serious problem with his business: *“He was a high-quality but earthy kind of guy,”* writes Hayford, *“As he talked about the problem and his frustration, he said, ‘You know, this damned thing ...’ He went on talking for several more minutes, and he used that expression three times.*

*When he got done, I said, ‘You know I’m not prudish, and you haven’t offended me, but I want to ask you, do you realize that in talking about this problem, three times you referred to it as ‘damned’?’ He said he hadn’t even realized he was using that word and started to apologize, but I stopped him.*

*‘This isn’t a matter of personal offense,’ I said. ‘I love you; you’re my brother. We’re talking about the problem you’re having, and I’m going to tell you why it’s a problem -- because of what you’ve done to it by your speech. What you have is the result of your own lips by cursing the problem instead of invoking the blessing of God on it.’”*

Like me, instead of allowing my camera to help me create the perfect photograph, I chose to curse it; and in so doing I destroyed what the camera was made to do. The words we speak; even the very words we even think, carry power. They carry the power to build up and they carry the power to destroy. Even the New Testament book of James weighs in on this: *“It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire,”* James says in chapter 3 verse 5. He continues: *“A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it.”*

In an analysis of police body-camera footage, Stanford researchers found that police officers speak less respectfully to black citizens than to white citizens. White residents were more likely than black residents to hear a police officer say “thank you” or to offer an apology. Black citizens were more likely than white residents to be called “bro” or “dude,” and to have the officer issue commands like “hands on the wheel.”

*“To be clear: There was no swearing,”* said one of the researchers. *“These were well-behaved officers,”* he said, *“But the many small differences in how they spoke with community members added up to pervasive racial disparities.”* This research suggests that subtle differences in language may be eroding relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

What does this have to do with us? It’s just a reminder that as Christians we have the responsibility to speak the language of our Creator. In the 2006 film *Akeelah and the Bee*, Akeelah a poor Los Angeles teenager who aspired to win the national spelling bee said of this language: *“You know that feeling where everything feels right? Where you don’t have to worry about tomorrow or yesterday, where you feel safe and know you’re doing the best you can? There’s a word for that, it’s called love. L-O-V-E.”*

Our every word; our every thought must reflect this love. We are, after all, the only picture God’s got to show His love to the world. Genesis 1:27 reminds us that when God created humankind he did so in His image. Each and every human being is created in the image and likeness of God — whether black, white, brown or any other color; whether gay or straight, male or female, republican or democrat...we were created not only by God but in God’s image. Homiletics says, *“Until we treat everyone as an equally valuable creation of God, at police traffic stops and at other human encounters, we are not being faithful to the word of God.”*

On the first day, says Genesis, God brought order out of chaos and light out of darkness. We can do the same, with the words we speak today.

Let us pray: Guide us Lord, to thy perfect light. Amen.