



Sunday
August 11th, 2024

Pentecost 12B

Words

Breaking Open the Word

**Pentecost 12
Liturgical Year B**



**St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE**

Anglican Diocese of
Gippsland



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from Lumo Series

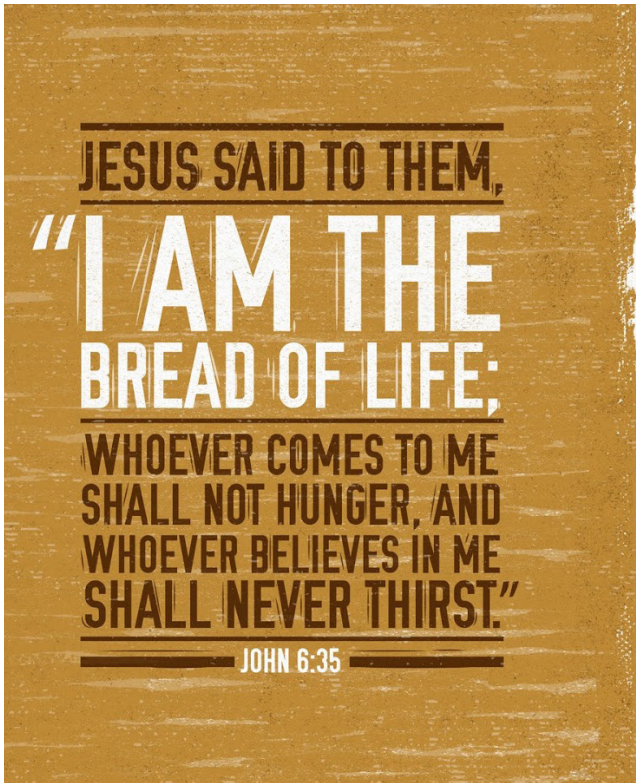
READINGS

1 Kings 19.4-8
Psalm 34.1-8
Ephesians 4.25 - 5.2
John 6.35, 41-51



Short Summary	4
Introduction	5
Sermon	9
Icebreaker	8
Discussion Questions	9
Five Days of Meditation and Prayer	15

Summary



“

I AM the bread of life

”

John 6

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to
be written for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them,
read, mark, learn, and inwardly
digest them,
that we may embrace and ever
hold fast the blessed hope
of everlasting life, which you
have given us in our Saviour
Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

In “Words Matter,” a sermon from the “Bread of Heaven” series, Dennis focuses on the profound influence of words. Referencing the 1982 synth-pop song “Words” by F.R. David, he underscores the sermon’s theme: the difficulty of expressing love through words. Drawing from John 6, he delves into the Greek words for love, stressing that English typically uses “love” to encompass eros (sexual attraction), philia (brotherly love), agape (unconditional love), and storg (family love).

The focus on words extends to Jesus’ extensive use, with Dennis highlighting the Saviour’s subtle shifts in audience and choice of words. Dennis also explores the concept of the incarnation, linking it to John 1:14, which describes the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. He underscores the idea of being “drawn” to proximity to the Torah, suggesting not only closeness but also embracing and belonging. This echoes being one with Jesus -- “through him, with him, in him.”

Recognising the ever-changing nature of language, Dennis discusses modifying the wording of the Lord’s Prayer for a funeral service, exemplifying the need for words to evolve to maintain their impact.

By partaking in the Eucharistic bread and cup, believers are reminded of the Lord’s death until His return, and this act serves as a testament of love, peace, wholeness, and acceptance when words are insufficient.

In his sermon, Dennis underscores our responsibility to be mindful of the power of our words and their potential to express love and effect positive change. He emphasises the importance of words in understanding the incarnation and eternal life offered through accepting Jesus, the Word made flesh.

THEMES

Language and Meaning: The importance of word choice and subtle shifts in meaning, particularly in religious contexts, such as translations of the Bible and the Gospel of John.

Biblical Interpretation: Discussion of the different Greek words for love (eros, philia, agape, storge) and their implications in understanding biblical texts.

Jesus as an Orator: Jesus’ skilful use of language in teaching, and the significance of words like “murmuring,” “drawn,” and “ate” in conveying deeper spiritual meanings.

Incarnation and Eucharist: The theological concept of mutual indwelling and the significance of the Eucharist as a reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice and the message of love, peace, and acceptance.

Challenges of Modern Language: The difficulty of translating ancient religious texts into modern language while preserving the original message, as illustrated by the changes in the Lord’s Prayer.

Cultural Reflections: The text reflects on changes in cultural practices and language over time, with a nostalgic tone for the past.

Theme of Words and Communication: The recurring theme of the power and challenge of words in expressing love, faith, and religious teachings, paralleled with the lyrics of the synth-pop song “Words.”

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



1982, the first year of my music education degree, was a time of invasion by the European “synth-pop” music into the popular charts. It took a while to take off here in Australia, with the first significant song making it to only number 14 on the pop charts, but it stayed in the top 100 for most of the year. It was a song by French synth-pop one-hit wonder F. R. David called Words.

Thankfully, expressing a distinct bias, Australia was still in its old proper band and good harmony expression, coupled with some somewhat different and exceptional on-stage dancing. Midnight Oil was there, with the later Senator Peter Garrett doing whatever that was: INXS, Crawl, Icehouse. Then we could talk about Jimmy Barnes and marvel at the most extended farewell tour that started in the 1980s by John Farnham. And then, who could forget Men at Work’s “I Come from a Land Down Under” in 1983, as Australia II did to the US in yachting what they have been doing to us ever since?

You may recall a high-spirited Bob Hawke, dressed in a blazer with the word “Australia” all over it, declaring that “any boss who sacks a worker for being late today is a bum!” I do miss the dramatics of the words of our leaders back then. Who will ever forget the woman who mocked R.G. Menzies with “If you were my husband, I’d give you hemlock”, only to have the reply, “Madam, if I were your husband, I’d gladly drink it!” I will admit to chuckling at vintage Paul Keating on the 7.30 Report this week, ending his interview with Sarah Ferguson with this gem that Australia “... does not need to be a pair of shoes hanging out of the American backside.” Ahh...bring back the good old days of gifted speakers.

This is where today’s gospel is critical to understanding all that the incarnation encompasses and all that life eternal in Jesus is about. It is all about the words used and the cleverness and subtlety in which they are used.

That synth-pop song from 1982, “Words”, with the immortal refrain, “Words don’t come easy to me to say that I love you.” The song ran for just under three minutes. I have just given you the words that occupy the entire song. “Words don’t come easy to say that I love you.”

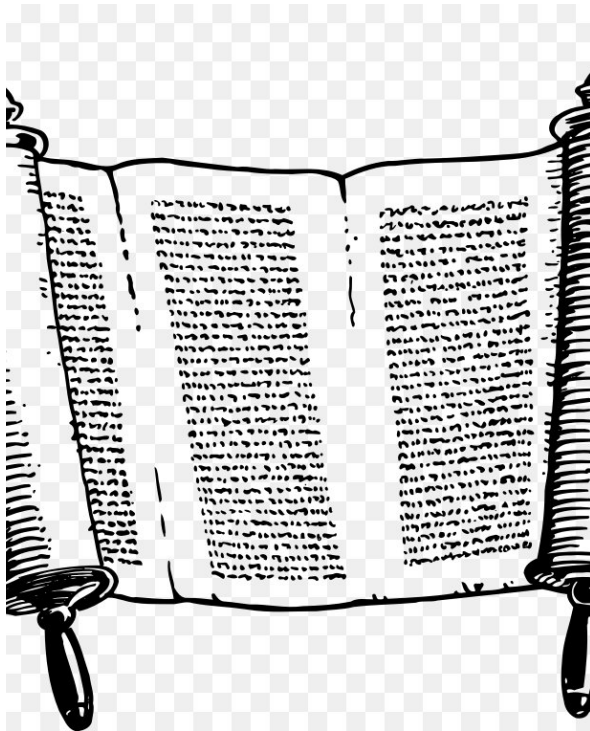
In the continuation of the Gospel of John, chapter 6, we could summarise the entire reading with just those lyrics. “Words don’t come easy to me to say I love you.”

Earlier in the year, Fr. Jeff preached on the love words used in Koine Greek, the language of the earliest papyrus of the Gospels. There was “eros”, which isn’t in the Bible at all, referring to that sexual attraction or love between two people; “philia”, meaning ‘universal or brotherly love’; ‘agape’, the perfect form of love as expressed in mutual respect and accountability, being the love that Jesus espouses for all of us as being ideal to live; and ‘storg’, the love between family members, or even the love of things that may be bad for us. The big secret that Jeff let us in on was that often, our English translations of the Bible use just one word for all four words. Love.

Now, fear not; this is not a lesson in history or Greek, but a little pointer to what is happening in the text today. Jesus, like any Rabbi, teaching as he was in Capernaum around the time of the Passover, was a very skilled orator. He may not have used the language of some of this nation’s more recent politicians, but he knew how to put a sentence together!

In this passage, there are little subtle shifts that our sense of English does not pick up. It does not change the literal meaning but does impact a need to know in terms of what is happening.

The first thing that I noticed was one word being changed. At the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus, in Capernaum, as mentioned, is addressing the crowd. Now, the crowd has been replaced with the word “Jews”. As then,

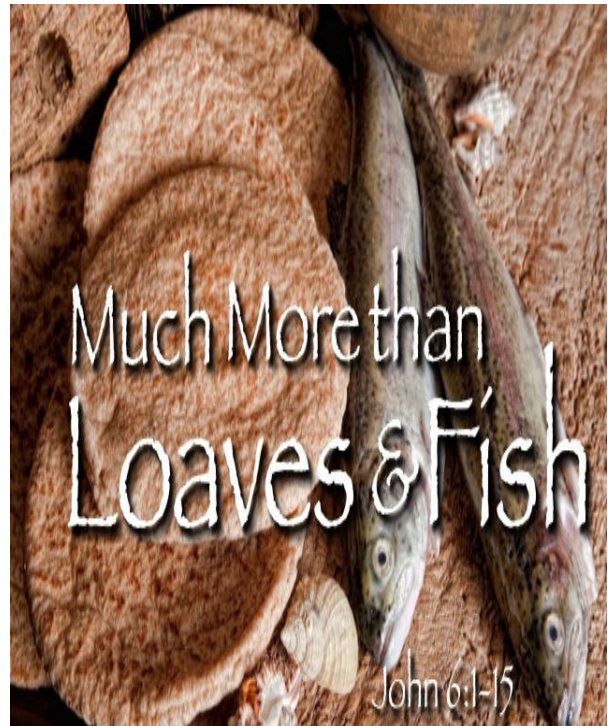


The Torah

as now, we must steer clear of any sense of anti-Semitism, but note that the people now being engaged with is not everyone but a subset of the listeners. Jesus is likely in conversation with the leaders, Pharisees, priests and scribes, all those smarty pants who know the law but somehow don't quite understand what it is about.

In today's version, the word 'complain' translates what I would presume to be grumbling. The word used by John, and then again by Jesus in 6.43, was not complaining, but rather, "murmuring". You could suggest that it means the same, but the word 'murmuring' is loaded with baggage that any good scholar of the Torah should have understood immediately. It was in response to the murmuring of the Israelites in the desert that God provided them with manna and quails. The concern of the learned was already working on discrediting Jesus by pointing out his not-so-rosy origins from Nazareth, disputing any notion that he was from heaven.

The next exciting word is the word "drawn." In the reading of the scrolls of the Torah, to get close to the scroll is said to be 'drawn' to them. You draw near with faith. We use the word partly in our service today, but in Greek, there is a subtle change. The form of the word used for drawn is derived from



'embracing' or 'being a part of.' Back to the mantra for the last few weeks. Through him, with him, in him. It is not about being in proximity; it is about being one with and in.



The next little whammy for the faith teachers was, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." This is at the heart of the story of the incarnation. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In the old text is embedded "logos", Word. Everyone embracing the Word made flesh from the Father comes to me." Jesus reveals that he, like Moses giving the Law, has seen God the Creator. He follows it with "Amen, Amen." "Verily, verily, I say unto thee..." or if you prefer Strine, the language of modern Australia, "Struth!" Jesus is presenting a fact. "Whoever believes has eternal life. I am (name of God warning there!) the bread of life. What you had in the past, you consumed and died. The word ate is now about to change.

When Jesus spoke about the eating of the bread in the wilderness, he used the word consumed and paired it with death. Another word for 'ate' is now used, meaning to chew and swallow. It will bring life, not death. It is not real bread or manna on the ground; it is an invitation to fully embrace God's life in

Jesus and the life that Jesus gives us. We are asked to embody the body of Christ fully, through, with and in. It is not about physical eating but 'mutual indwelling'.

"This mutual indwelling flows from the union that exists between the Father and the Son. Jesus lives because of the will of the Father; we live because of the will of Jesus." (Mahoney, p 397)

It's only subtle changes, but it is sufficient for us to wonder how words matter.

I still smile at the Church scene in "Death in Brunswick" when Carl, who hadn't been to Church since Latin was phased out, asked his mother, "What have they done to the Church, Mum?" His mother replied, "It's called the Mass, Carl." The words have changed, but sometimes, we fail to get the message. Even in preparing a funeral, two for this week, the conversation has had to happen regarding the choice of the Lord's Prayer. "The words of 1539 no longer have the same meanings in 2024, so we use our tongue today to give a closer expression to the words of Jesus." That is not how I would explain it on a pastoral visit, but it is essentially what has happened.

Back to the synth-pop, Words.
Words don't come easy to me.

How can I find a way to make you see I love

you?

Words don't come easy.

Words don't come easy to me.

This is the only way for me to say I love you

Words don't come easy.

I guess that they don't for some. We are called to listen. Jesus is saying to those listening that in terms of life in him, through him to God, and with the unity of the Holy Spirit, some of the words are not coming easy. Our language, not being classical or romantic, does, at times, struggle to get the whole message across.

But the message has stayed the same. By this incarnation, death and resurrection, it is God's will that we live in the Son and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, work on bringing love, peace, wholeness and acceptance to the whole world. The reminder that we are given that this is required is simply this: "On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, gave you thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body given for you. Do this in memory of me.'" What could be easier for us to do when our words don't come easy?

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11.26)

End Notes

1. Moloney, Francis J.. Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John (p. 398). Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition.

Icebreaker!



If you were a dessert,
what would you be and
why?



GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

What are the four types of love mentioned in the sermon, and how do they differ?

Four Greek words for love: eros (sexual attraction), philia (brotherly love), agape (unconditional love), and storg (family love).

How can we be more intentional in expressing these different types of love in our daily lives?

Question 2

Why does Dennis say that Jesus was a skilled orator, and what impact does word choice have on the message?

Jesus used words strategically to convey deeper meanings, like the shifts in language present in John 6 when addressing the crowd and Jewish leaders.

How can we improve our word choices in conversations to share our faith with others better?

Question 3

What does the 'Word becoming flesh' mean, and how does it connect to the theme of the sermon?

In John 1:14, the phrase 'Word becoming flesh' is connected to Jesus being the incarnation and the way to attain eternal life by embracing His teachings.

How can we more fully embody the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives?

Question 4

How does the act of partaking in the Eucharist serve as a way to express love, peace, wholeness, and acceptance when words fail us?



The significance of the Eucharist and its role in proclaiming the Lord's death until He returns.

What other ways can we show love and acceptance to others when our words aren't enough?

Question 5

Why is it essential to adapt words and language for different contexts, like the example of the Lord's Prayer for a funeral service?

The sermon highlights the evolving nature of language and the need to adapt words to convey their intended meanings effectively.

How can we adapt our language in different settings to better share our messages and reach out to various people?

End notes and further reading

N.T. Wright, **Paul for Everyone, Ephesians**, Westminster John Knox Press

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John

Sacra Pagina

Author Francis Maloney

Publisher Liturgical Press, 2016

Pray...

Ask for prayer requests and invite the group to share specific needs or concerns.

- Pray for God's guidance in applying the sermon to our lives throughout the week.
- Pray for a deeper understanding of the different types of love and how we can express them to others.
- Pray for wisdom and discernment in our words to convey love and bring positive change.



Brabarlung Totem
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Gunaikurnai Land, and our
respects are paid to the First
Nations people everywhere.



August continues

This devotional plan aims to guide you through a week of intentional reflection, prayer, and application of the sermon's message, focusing on love, wisdom, and support for others.

Day 1: Seeking God's Guidance

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Reflection: Begin your week by surrendering your plans and decisions to God. Trust that He will guide you in every step you take, especially in applying the sermon's message to your life.

Prayer Focus: Ask for God's guidance in understanding and living out the principles you've learned from the sermon. Pray that He leads you in all your decisions this week.

Day 2: Understanding and Expressing Love

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-8 (NIV)

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

Reflection: Reflect on the different types of love—agape, phileo, and eros. Consider how each type can be expressed in your relationships with others, and how God's love is foundational to them all.

Prayer Focus: Pray for a deeper understanding of the different types of love and for the ability to express them genuinely to those around you.

Day 3: Wisdom in Our Words

Scripture: Proverbs 16:24 (NIV)

"Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

Reflection: Words have the power to uplift or to wound. Consider how you can use your words this week to convey love, bring healing, and encourage others.

Prayer Focus: Ask God for wisdom and discernment in your speech. Pray that your words will reflect His love and bring positive change to those who hear them.

Day 4: Caring for Others' Needs

Scripture: Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."

Reflection: Think about the needs and concerns that others in your group or community may be carrying. How can you support them, not just in prayer but also through tangible actions?

Prayer Focus: Lift up the specific prayer requests shared by others in your group. Pray that God will provide for their needs and show you how you can be a blessing to them.

Day 5: Living Out the Sermon

Scripture: James 1:22 (NIV)

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Reflection: As the week comes to a close, reflect on how you've applied the sermon's teachings in your life. Consider any challenges you faced and how you can continue to grow in this area.

Prayer Focus: Pray for the strength and commitment to live out God's word daily. Ask for perseverance in following His guidance and expressing His love in all you do.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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