

Some of you have seen the picture cube I have with photos of our grandsons. However, it is more than photos. If you press the bar on the top of each picture their voices are heard. Now as this was done a few years ago mostly all you hear is giggles with an occasional, “I love you Grampy!” There is something about pressing this button and hearing their giggles that makes me smile. Now I could have them record a new message and I could update their pictures (make more sense than getting a new cube every year)—but these are “beloved” giggles and I don’t want to lose them. They are older now and they just don’t giggle like they used to!

Who are the beloved of God? What do the voices of the beloved of God sound like?

For the two passages that we read this morning I prefer the NRSV translation over some of the others. There is nothing wrong with the others except they use “lover” and/or “dear friends” in the place of “my beloved.” For me, “my beloved” has a deeper, stronger meaning and gives an image of deeper love and faithfulness. The New American Standard Dictionary defines “beloved”:

- *greatly loved
- *dear to the heart
- *one who is greatly loved.

These are images of someone who is extremely special in the eyes of the writer. One who stands over and above all others. One who is often thought about and whose presence brings a sense of joy and celebration.

We live in a day when the word “love” has almost become meaningless. We love anything and everything. You have seen the bumper stickers, I love _____. We received a notice in the mail yesterday that the city of Lynnwood is having a contest: I Love Lynnwood _____. We love pizza, apple pie, the Seahawks, etc. We attach the word love to almost anything. To say we love something is almost meaningless because we may not love tomorrow what we love today. Another fad may come along, we discover a new food or taste, a new star is on the horizon and our love moves to another.

Being the “beloved” of is more than just a fad. It signifies a relationship that is destined to stand beyond the limits of time. Those giggles are “beloved giggles” which is why I don’t update them.

The writer of the Song speaks of her beloved. There is something about being in the presence of her beloved that causes the heart to beat a little faster. She sees no imperfection in her beloved. There is a sense of hope, expectation, promise when her beloved is present. She thinks of him when they are apart but when he is there – there is a sense of warmth, security. All is well in the presence of her beloved.

I remember the story of a little girl who was afraid of a storm in the night. She went to her parent’s room where they assured her that there was nothing to be afraid of. They tried to send her back to her room with the assurance that, “Jesus is there with you.” She replied, “Yes, I know. But I want someone with skin on.” All is well

in the presence of the beloved. There are days when we all need “someone with skin on.”

James writes as one having a deep concern for those he is writing to. They are more than dear friends. They are those whom he calls, “beloved.” He wants them to understand the depth of his love and concern for them which echoes the depth and concern of God for them. He expresses this concern by calling them his “my beloved”. He wants them to understand and know God’s love in its fullest. God’s love does not and has not changed. James demonstrates this love by the depth of his love and concern for them.

Then James reminds them that the love of God is a love to be shared. This is James’ I Corinthian 13 passage: Love is. Love listens and is slow to anger. This is not always easy to do in our world. Love thinks through its response before responding. We know that anger seldom if ever solves our problems and seldom if ever solves the world’s problems. So often we respond without thinking. Anger comes instead of love.

James continues that we need to rid ourselves of the sordid things of the world. We are now living in a new atmosphere dominated by love, concern and caring for one another. We need to be seeking the example of God and become a “beloved” community. We need to see others through the eyes of God’s love. Of course, it takes work to become a community of the “beloved.” It takes work to be the “beloved voices” of our God.

In other words, our words but be accompanied by deeds. We need to more than just hear the words. Word must be lived out through us. If you hear then in some way we must respond to the needs before us. We must become the “beloved voices” of our God.

He uses the example of looking into a mirror. Now is there anyone here who did not look into a mirror this morning? Apparently you all did or no one wants to admit they didn’t. However, in James’ day mirrors were not common household objects nor were they of the quality we have today. You could go for months or years and maybe even a lifetime without seeing your reflection. On those rare occasions when you did get to see your reflection you would soon forget. The memory of your looks would soon be forgotten. James reminds us that we also often forget that we are to be the “beloved voice” of our God through our actions and deeds. We are in the process of becoming the “beloved voices” of our God. We, therefore, need to be doing that which demonstrates the love of God through our actions and our deeds.

Now it is interesting that James then calls for us to watch out for our tongues. How often do we speak and get into trouble with our words. How often are our words less than beloved words? We speak before we think – open mouth, insert foot. We all have said words we wish we could recall. We have spoken when perhaps silence would have been a better option. I remember Mark Twain’s adage: “It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.” James calls us to stop talking and start doing. To stop and think before we speak – beloved voices are also beloved hands, feet, etc.

James calls us to stop talking and get to work. These are harsh words for those who love committees, meetings, etc. But these are the “beloved” words to those who are the “beloved of God.” Do our words, actions and deeds reflect our position before our God?

Listen again to James’ words to the people of God from The Message:

Post this at all the intersections, dear friends (my beloved): Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God’s righteousness doesn’t grow from human anger. So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.

Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don’t act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eyes, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.

Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Zondervan, 2002