

WANT TO TALK TODAY ABOUT WORDS..... There is a story that concerns something that is said to have happened in a restroom at IBM's Watson Research Lab in Yorktown Heights, NY. A supervisor had placed a sign directly above the sink. It had a single word on it — "THINK!" The next day, when he went to the restroom, he noticed that right below his sign, next to the soap dispenser, someone had placed another sign that read "THOAP" "THINK-sink-THOAP – soap!

I WANT TO TALK ABOUT WORDS TODAY BECAUSE ... On this the first Sunday of the New Year as we launch into 2011 we will do what we do every week. We will do what Christians have done for centuries now on the first day of every week, the day of Creation, of Resurrection, of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost, we will gather to worship God and to give our attention to the One we know as the Word of God, Jesus Christ, revealed to us in the words of holy scripture, a testimony that we also in a secondary way describe as the word of God. We gather in part because as Christians we know the value of words, especially words that point us to THE Word about whom we read in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the Word who is God, who was with God and who is God from the very beginning who in the person of Jesus of Nazareth became flesh and blood and we beheld the glory of this Word, glory as like the very glory of God.

Because of all this, words, words about life, about faith, about the past, the present and the future are very important to us. Words, helping us to relate to and respond to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, are especially important to us and should never be ignored or downplayed, but to be valued and welcomed.

To be faithful friends and followers of our Lord requires us to hear and receive the Word, to wrestle with the Word and to let that Word come to shape who we are and what we do and what we refrain from doing. It is in this sense that we are called to what I am calling in this sermon, WORDY LIVING – living according to who the Word of God is, Jesus our Lord, and living after the manner and expressing the likeness of this Jesus. Living faithfully is to engage in WORDY LIVING.

Something I look out for around the turn of the year is the annual awards for the "Word of the Year". In the English-speaking world it is always interesting to see the similarities and the differences between the words so recognized in different countries. I plan to use some of the nominees for the word of the year in the USA and the UK to describe how we here at Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church might engage more fully and faithfully in WORDY LIVING in 2011.

Some of the words of the year come from major EVENTS OF THE YEAR

top kill - a procedure designed to seal a leaking oil well, whereby large amounts of a material heavier than the oil—e.g., mud—are pumped into the affected well.

Tea Party a US political movement.

bankster - a member of the banking industry perceived as a predator that grows rich at the expense of those affected by an economic recession: trillions of dollars are flowing to the banksters in the form of near-zero interest loans. [origin — 1930s: blend of banker and gangster]

vuvuzela - a long horn blown by fans at soccer matches.

Some folks didn't like this noise during the World Cup, some suggested that vuvuzelas should be banned but that was never going to happen and that was a good and the right thing. Why? Because in apartheid era South Africa soccer was the sport of the majority black population, rugby and cricket were sports favored by the minority white population who held all the power, and so at a soccer match blowing the vuvuzela was in a sense a protest and an affirmation of identity and so became part of the call for freedom – so I say blow on vuvuzelas – let freedom continue!

We don't have too many vuvuzelas here at OAPC and in some ways that is a shame – as a church in 2010 we, you, all of us did a lot for a lot of people, to care, to teach, to comfort, to challenge, to love. We don't do this so we can trumpet how great we are to others but maybe once in a while we all need to be reminded of all the great work that we together make possible by our giving and serving... it is okay from time to time to toot our horns not to say “look at us” but as a continued encouragement to and for all of us to continue the good work.

double-dip - denoting or relating to a recession during which a period of economic decline is followed by a brief period of growth, followed by a further period of decline: higher food and energy prices could increase the risk of a double-dip recession.

Challenging year in the economy, most of us see our personal budgets remain under a degree of stress and this has also been the case for the church budget. Maybe some of that extra tooting we just talked about can inspire us forward. In challenging times God still provides, and God still expects us to give and share and to be generous. I hope in 2011 we can encourage individuals or families who experience the loss of a job or some other economic distress to allow the church into how they respond and deal with this. To lose a job is a difficult thing, but in these days it is not a value statement on anyone – there may well be place in our church life for a group to offer mutual help, support, networking and emotional and spiritual support.....

Los 33 - the group of thirty-three Chilean miners who were trapped underground for more than two months, emerging after their dramatic rescue to become national celebrities.

The rescue of Los 33 was an amazing story – it was so moving – of course in the way of the world and life it was only a few weeks later when a similar number of miners in New Zealand died in an explosion there – joy and sorrow, everywhere we look.

It is into the real world that the full power and sweep of the Word of God comes crashing when “God's Word became flesh and lived among us” in Jesus the Christ. In Jesus the Word is no longer limited to speech, now God's Word becomes incarnate, in human form, the Word takes on the flesh and journeys with us and among us - a living, breathing embodiment of God's grace and truth. Word, action, activity, flesh and spirit unite in the person of Jesus, who shows most clearly all that God desires for all of creation. Jesus is as we heard a few weeks back the visible likeness of the invisible God, the photo of the unseen God.

Some of us will recall the days when TV screens were smaller than a foot across, displayed only black-and-white images and lived inside a monstrous wooden cabinet resembling a piece of oversized Victorian furniture. The image on that little screen was what today we would call low resolution! Yet, we can recall how neighbors would all crowd around those early, wondrous devices, to marvel at those

grainy images. Now on our TV's we have "high resolution" and "high definition" screens for much sharper images. In the Word who becomes flesh we see God in high definition. In the Word become flesh, God's grace and truth is fully released into the world – that is why we need to make a huge deal over the truth at the center of Christmas that God, the Word, became flesh. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ we have a full and fresh new perspective on who God is and who God needs us to be and to become. It is Jesus Christ who calls us and commissions us to WORDY LIVING – living that is based around the Word of God come in the flesh from whom the world and we have received grace and truth, grace and truth that must inspire, and shape and guide our WORDY LIVING as Christian people.

The Word of God coming to us in Jesus invites us to be transformed, to be moved and to be changed, to alter our perspective from law to grace and truth and in so doing to live into grace, and to live into truth. Now grace and truth are no longer just words, they are the new reality that God has and God is creating through Jesus, the reality that calls out to us to engage in WORDY LIVING.

Some of the words of the year reflect the importance of the MEDIA AND INTERNET
Showmance - a romantic relationship that develops between actors during the course of making a film etc., or between participants in a TV show, either real or engineered for the sake of publicity'
Gleek - a fan of the television series Glee.
Tweeps- people using the social networking service Twitter; a person's followers on Twitter
OAPC has a new design for our website – check it out – there will be things that need to be added and corrected and you can help by clicking on the links and using the site.

Our plan is to be more engaging with newer people to the community or congregation, to offer a first point of contact, as we know many people first check us out online. Communications Committee would love to hear from some of you who have gifts and skills in this are – and much of this work does not mean attending a committee meeting – it can be done from home or wherever you access a computer – Brian Hamel – Bryant Barnes – Bob McCann – John O'Kain will be ready to recruit you to the team.

Upcycling- the reuse of discarded or waste material in such a way as to create a product of higher quality or value than the original. By working together – connecting programs and opportunities for worship, outreach, relationships, discipleship and support – we have the opportunity to upcycle in the ministry and mission of our church.

Likely all of us will at some time or another have heard people say, "That's just words" or "That's just talk." Often times such a statement is accompanied by a sneer and a dismissive wave of the hand. Maybe you will recall a time when you yourself said this. Shakespeare's Danish Prince, Hamlet, is asked a question about what he's reading, he responds, "Words, words, words" — implying that the words in front of him are meaningless. Hamlet's "Words, words, words" lead directly to Seinfeld's "Yada, yada, yada." Such thinking lies behind something that we have all been told at one time or another – "What is important are deeds, not words", "Words are cheap, it's action that counts."

But we need to be careful when we play with such thoughts because in truth words have real power. Words are a huge part of God's creation for us humans to be helped to understand the purpose of living and so discover the WORDY LIVING into which we are called by God. We need reminding of all that

Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel meant we he wrote, “Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds.”

In just the past few months there have been some shocking examples of the deliberate and malicious misuse of words to harm and taunt and hurt. Several of these situations led to teen suicides, the result of verbal bullying. In such cases, words were used cruelly, to put down, to draw attention to real or imagined differences, to promote fear, to categorize and terrorize, to despise, and to demean. Words have power and as followers of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, made real, human flesh, we must never use words for such ends and we must be ready to stand alongside any victimized and against any who seek to inflame passions or fears.

SO FAR WE HAVE DISCUSSED SOME OF THE NOMINEES AS WORD OF THE YEAR – NOW THE WINNERS!

UK WORD OF THE YEAR

big society - a political concept whereby a significant amount of responsibility for the running of a society's services is devolved to local communities and volunteers

US WORD OF THE YEAR

The New Oxford American Dictionary's 2010 Word of the Year is a new word all together, some would say it is not yet even a word – it is refudiate, a verb coined by a certain Alaskan politician, a blend of refute and repudiate. I want to close this sermon and open up the new year by using those two words of the year!

In 2011 God has fresh opportunities for all of us, new challenges for our church to embrace, new avenues for service to follow, new people for us to embrace, new places to take us, new depths of commitment for us to reach.

This Church, Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church is a “big society” congregation with a place and role for every member to make their fullest contribution as together we serve and follow Jesus Christ, as we engage in WORDY LIVING. We are a “big society” church ready to be and do all we can be and do in our community and world, and that takes all of us engaging faithfully in WORDY LIVING.

At the risk of annoying all the Winthrop faculty and teachers of all grades, because of the Word becoming flesh, I “refudiate” all limits on who we can become and what we can do, because we have been very richly and seriously blessed by God and enriched by the fullness of the grace of God and we therefore have a lot to offer and give, we need to be fully generous, be wholly devoted, be completely dedicated, be absolutely committed, to WORDY LIVING. AMEN.