

Words, Words, **Words**: The New Tower of Babel

*Say yes when you mean yes, no, when you mean no,
Anything more is from the evil one.ⁱ (Matt 5:31)*

We communicate by words, actions, behavior and these align with our thoughts, intentions, and deeds. Listening to the words we hear these days I am oftentimes hard pressed to see how we can root out the truth. In the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) *God confuses the language of the people because he notes nothing will stop them from what they presume to*



do. It appears there is again the attempt to build but now we are now in the second episode of the Tower of Babel where it is not God causing confusion but rather man creating confusion for man. Tell me what you believe and I can google it and find a diametrically opposed belief in a matter of minutes. Truths are lies, lies are truths, facts are replaced



by alternative facts...so how am I, an ordinary person, to know what is right

and just, factual and honorable? Many are so entrenched in their own narrow point of view that they accept nonsense and falsehoods and half-truths for the purposes of protecting their own beliefs and demeaning those with different perspectives. In some situations this is accomplished in ignorance, in others it is purposeful and deliberate with no concern for what really is the truth. This is especially harmful when done by those in positions of responsibility holding the power to instantly communicate to the many in this technological age. Words are being cheapened by their careless and misleading use; their power of persuasion can be for good when words are truthful, for evil when words are deceitful. Unfortunately, *a meddling tongue subverts many listeners.* (Sir 28:14) and the *"evil one" has no truth in him since lying speech is his native tongue.* (John 8:44).

Scripture encourages us to *speak the truth to one another* (Zech. 8:16) noting that *truthful lips endure forever* (Prov. 12:19), while a *liar's way leads to dishonor* (Sir 20:25), and we need to recognize that *a liar in boast is a liar in deed.* (Jer. 48:30). It is only the Lord that can *deliver us from the scourge of a slanderous tongue and the lips that went over to falsehood.* (Sirach 51:3). Light comes to us *when we remove from our midst false accusations and malicious speech* (Is 58:9c) something not always easily done.



In our human nature we have a tendency to first believe what we hear if it appears in the context of our beliefs and biases. If, on further thought, it troubles our consciences, we may look into it further and seek additional evidence if we have the time and are willing to make the effort. What can make things worse is a constant barrage of false or half-truth statements that can

overwhelm our trying to sift out the truth; hence, we need to stay quiet and not spend too much time listening to useless babel of deceitful and arrogant tongues and not allow those earthly tides create the undercurrent that moves us in the wrong direction.

God' first words in the bible, Genesis 1:3, are "Let there be light," and it is clear that light is the first essential ingredient in creation. Light is also used as a metaphor for understanding as when someone exclaims, "I now see the light," and so God is also telling us with His first words to come to an understanding that He is, He exists, and His Words are powerful communicators achieving their end; " in the words of a prophet: *my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.*" (Isaiah 55:11).

It is Christ Jesus, God's Word made flesh, who exemplifies the power of words spoken *in the Spirit of truth coming from the Father*, (John 15:26), words that confront evil with love, forgiveness, and justice. Love is possible because we have the freedom to choose good over evil, forgiveness because we all are flawed and make our share of mistakes but are humble enough to admit it, justice because we are given consciences to rise above malicious prejudice. His words may not tell us what we want to hear but rather what we need to hear, and if we reject them life becomes disjointed, if we accept them life becomes coherent and we are given new strength. *He is the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:5), his guidance still coming as *the still and gentle whisper* that surprised Elijah (1Kings 19:11-13).

We need to find the peace and quiet to meditate and think about we hear in our divided culture and while we listen to our leaders we remember the responsibility to accept or reject is with us. The New Covenant (Jer.31:31-34) indicates God sensitizes our consciences, speaks to us in whispers, reminding us find the time to leave behind the chaotic war of worldly words.

The Lord will give you bread in adversity and water in affliction. No longer will your Teacher hide himself, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher, and your ears shall hear a word behind you: "This is the way; walk in it, "when you would turn to the right or the left. (Isaiah 30:20)

<http://melkaplace.com>

ⁱ These guiding words (Matt 5:31) might be best prefixed to interviewees when they are asked a question to be answered with a simple yes or no..... since usually they are still talking five minutes later without having answered the question.