

ALL IN THE FAMILY  
MOTHER'S DAY MAY 8, 2011  
Hebrews 10:23-25a; Ephesians 4:29-32 (NLB)

As you know, today is Mother's Day and the celebration of the Christian home. For 30 years, Pat and I have had a tradition in our ministry that on this Sunday we would share together a message related to family life. This is a day to celebrate families of all kinds so we have chosen once again to share our thoughts with you, our church family.

When our children were young, they would help with the service in some way. We were quick to admit we weren't perfect parents. However, we are blessed that our children have become wonderful adults in spite of our mistakes! They both married and have two children each. Now as grandparents we can make all the mistakes we want, and just send them home!

As a fellowship of Christian believers here at Maple Grove, we're also a part of another family to celebrate today—the family of God. In many ways our church family is an extension of our home family and has many of the same needs and problems. One basic need they both fulfill is to be a place of nurturing. Unfortunately, a problem they both share is sometimes being a source of frustration.

Do you remember the old cowboy song, *Home on the Range*—where never is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day?

Most of us would enjoy a home like that. Charles Swindoll related the ideal to the church in this parody of the song that sounds great, too:

O give me a church where folks in the lurch  
are encouraged, then healed from above,  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word;  
and the truth is modeled in love.

Not long ago I spoke about nonverbal communication and how it reflects our Christian commitment. Today we focus on the verbal side of our communication, our encouraging and discouraging words. There's no doubt our spoken words can reflect our commitment, but they can also get us into trouble.

For instance, police in Los Angeles had good luck with a robbery suspect who just couldn't control himself. When detectives asked each man in the lineup to repeat the words: "Give me all your money or I'll shoot," one man responded, "That's not what I said!"

We find many clear directives in scripture to be bearers of positive action. We read in Hebrews today, "Think of ways to encourage one another." and in Ephesians, "Let your words be an encouragement to those who hear them."

Talking about encouragement may seem very simplistic, but it's too often disregarded. Why do we need it? Because life isn't easy. Every one of us here today could share a story of something in our lives that is difficult to deal with right now.

Even children understand discouragement. Thanks to one of their favorite friends (and mine) on Sesame Street, Kermit the frog, the idea was put into a song that helps them—and us—voice those feelings.

Because he's always been a kid at heart, Dave will share Kermit's song with us—it's called *It's Not Easy Being Green*.

What's not easy for you today? Could you benefit from some helpful support? Encouragement is a ministry that can be shared and celebrated in both the home and the church. With so much criticism and complaining all around us today, people are emotionally starved for affirmation.

A word of encouragement can often make the difference between someone giving up or going on. So today let's consider together how encouragement helps families and churches to stay motivated to "keep on keeping on."

**First**, let's consider what we mean by the word "encouragement." "parakalein" is the Greek word that is translated as "encourage." In New Testament times, it was a rallying call used by leaders to urge each other on to exhort each other to noble deeds and high thoughts.

We're all on a journey of faith and one of the powerful ways we can support each other is with rallying calls of encouragement and affirmation.

(How about, "Way to go, Dave!")

I'm reminded of the familiar analogy in nature you may have heard. When geese fly in formation, the lead goose will eventually drop back to the side where the air passes more easily and another will move to the cutting edge. If one goose is hurt and drops back, another goose goes along. All the while, the geese honk from behind. What we think of as "unnecessary noise" is their way of urging one another on.

I think this adds a whole new perspective to honking in rush hour traffic jams!

A **second** way to consider encouragement is to look at our English dictionary. It states that the prefix "en" (e-n) means "to put into." What are we putting into others? En-courage—we're putting in courage—that "mental or moral strength to venture forth, to persevere, and to withstand danger, fear, or difficulty."

When we cry out in our distress or frustration, "God, help me!" We're often praying for courage—that moral strength to keep on trusting God in the face of fears and difficulties.

We all need courage occasionally, just like a young African named Joseph.

Some American students were traveling through Kitale, Kenya where they met Joseph. He explained that he was a Christian working in a parish that was experiencing severe famine. At his home they found 500 children and only one small building that was the church. The children slept in a small, fenced-in compound to the side of the church.

Joseph explained that every day he walked miles into the desert collecting children whose parents were dead or too weak to care for them. He carried them to the church and had just enough money to buy food.

That night, the students met in the church for evening prayers. Joseph said, "Sometimes all I need is courage, just someone to say, 'You're strong, Joseph, you can walk further.'" Then he bowed his head and said to the students, "Feel free, 'courage' me." The students prayed for Joseph that night and taught him some spiritual songs.

Late into the night they heard Joseph brightly singing the new songs. They had literally put into his mind and spirit "couraging" words that brought new dedication to persevere.

So who in our family of God needs to be 'courage'd?

For one, spiritual leaders need it—like the pastors of a church and their families. Dave and I praise God for how you have "courage'd" us during our interim months here. Pastor Bill and Dorothy have known it. Pastor Glenn and his family will need it as well.

But it's not only pastors. The staff, lay leaders, workers, and worshipers in the church need encouragement, too. We all need to be "courage'd!"

We've looked at what encouragement means and who needs it. **Thirdly**, let's consider how to express it most effectively to our friends and families. One way is in the terms used by Joyce Landorf: "balcony people" and "basement people."

Balcony people are the ones who give the gift of affirmation. They are the people who catch you doing something right and call out to you on your journey:

"You're special."

"You did a good job—thanks."

They assure you, "It's ok to make a mistake, fail—or it's ok to be green."

They can say "I forgive you." Or, "I'm sorry."

But, they also know how to disagree agreeably. They allow anger; they just don't allow it to become destructive.

They also know that sometimes the best thing to say is: nothing—and just listen.

Of course some well-intentioned balcony people can still suffer from "foot-in-mouth disease." One willing church worker agreed to call on members in the hospital. Approaching a bed where an elderly woman was sitting up, the visitor began cheerily, "Well, you certainly look as if you won't be around much longer!"

Basement people are easy to picture, too. Unfortunately, every family and church has a few.

They are the people who are constantly pulling others down instead of building them up.

They are the “over-expectors” who thrive in the “room for improvement.” (Of course, it’s always “for your own good.”)

They find fault, complain, and gossip.

They are like a character in the old cartoon, “Gulliver’s Travels,” called Glum. His countenance matched his name and his favorite expression was, “**It’ll never work.**”

Remember the old schoolyard chant “Sticks & stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me?” It’s not true! The wounds from words can hurt long after bones heal and often leave lasting scars on broken spirits.

Balcony people, basement people –have you been thinking of the people in your life who fit those profiles? But, honestly, we have to ask ourselves, “Where am I most often? In the balcony—or in the basement?”

Paul had a lot to say about our words with each other. He aptly describes these two types of communicators in his words to the Ephesians. “Don’t use foul or abusive language.... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander”—that’s basement talk.

And then he goes on to say, “Let everything you say be good and helpful.... Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you”—that’s balcony talk.

But did you ever notice how easy it is for balcony people, who are otherwise normally very positive, to get “sucked into” basement talk. We need to stay alert in those situations and “just say no” to negative conversations. A helpful phrase I heard years ago goes: **You don’t have to blow out someone else’s candle to let your own light shine.**

Since words carry a heavy responsibility, we may need reminders of what we already know. I heard on the radio of a poll taken about mothers. The majority of respondents said they appreciated their mom’s advice and the gem they remembered most was: “If you can’t say anything nice.... What? ....**don’t say anything at all!**” We all know it!! Now, we have to live it!

There are many different ways we can be that balcony encourager. Words of thanks and affirmation always work, but it could also be hospitality, listening, lending a helping hand, writing notes, praying for someone, a timely phone call, just “being there” if needed, or giving a little gift.

Even children know the value of balcony expressions—like Linus in a Peanuts cartoon. One day Charlie Brown and Linus were walking to school. Linus was carrying

a big bouquet of flowers for his teacher. Charlie brown says, “Linus, you’re not going to get more favor with Miss Jones by bribing her with flowers.” Linus responds indignantly, “Bribery? Bribery?! I tend to think of it as ‘priming the pump!’”

Even a kindly touch or hug can bring joy. I’ll never forget many years ago when I gave a hug to one of the dear elderly saints of the church and she began to cry. I was afraid I had offended her, but she quickly explained it had been years since anyone had hugged her, and it felt so wonderful!

**BE SURE TO GIVE A FRIENDLY HUG TO SOMEONE TODAY!**

As we live and work together as families at home and at church, let’s remember to speak words that heal and don’t hurt, that unite and don’t divide, that build up and don’t tear down. And when we do occasionally forget, and we will, let’s remember to say, “I’m sorry”—because it’s not easy being “human!”

(But I think it’s what we want to be!)

It’s not easy living together as a family at home or in the church. What holds us “all in the family is not performance—being good at something –it’s love, unconditional love and acceptance. Nobody can get it right all the time. But, all of us in the family of God are one body in Christ—bound together in God’s love. Those ties allow us to affirm each other and build happier homes and churches—

Even if we happen to be “green!”

We’d like to close with a song that carries this thought. It’s called “Bind Us Together.” The words are in your bulletin.

**AMEN**

(SING: *BIND US TOGETHER, LORD*)