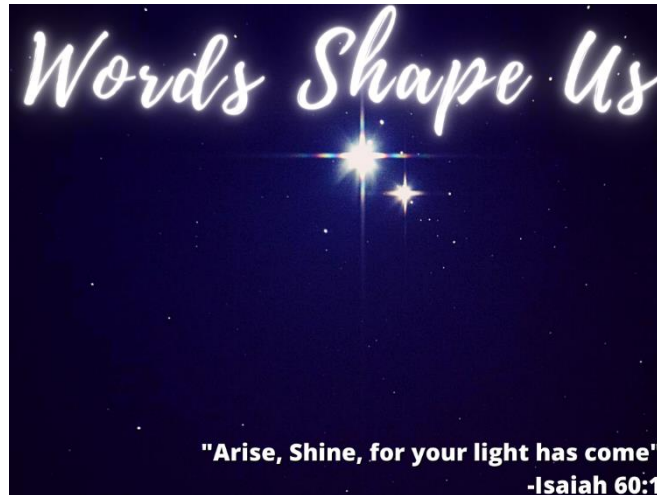


BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JANUARY 3, 2021
STAR WORD SUNDAY



The Scripture
Matthew 16:13-19

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Message
Words Shape Us
Mark Briley

January 3, 2021. That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Three days into the New Year. How are your resolutions holding up? Maybe you didn't make any. Some years I have and succeeded... a little. Some years I have and failed... a lot. Some years I haven't made any at all in defiance of the practice that seems more gimmicky than genuine. But I'm all for goals and improvement and change.



Woody Guthrie's New Year's Rulin's¹, as he called them, have been circulating social media again of late. Guthrie, the Dust Bowl Troubadour, grew up just down the road a ways from where we lived in Tulsa – Okemah, Oklahoma to be specific. He penned (and illustrated), a list of 33 rulin's he would

work toward in 1942. Interesting list: *Work more and better; work by a schedule; wash teeth if any; shave; take bath; eat good; drink very scant if any; write a song a day; wear clean clothes; change socks; learn people better; don't get lonesome; stay glad; dream good; have company but don't waste time; dance better; beat fascism; love mama; love papa; love Pete; love everybody; make up your mind; wake up and fight.*

That wasn't all 33 but many of them. Reasonable rulin's I suppose. "*Wash teeth, if any,*" probably my favorite. It's always good to have a few on the things-to-do list that you can check off easily. I washed all my teeth this morning so feeling like we're off to a good start. I do hope for things moving into 2021 – and not *things* as in *stuff* – but things as in experiences, and character development, and important growth in relationships.

If 2020 taught us anything, it taught us to prioritize good health and good relationships. If we're ever ready for a New Year, this is it; right? Christmas is always a miracle – the marvel at the incarnation of God – and the more than unique way we celebrated it as a faith family here at Broadway. But... the New Year has come and today marks another special occasion in the church year -- *Epiphany* -- a celebration of the Magi's visit to Jesus. Or the dictionary definition:

*A moment in which you suddenly see
or understand something
in a new or very clear way.*

These revelations drive us to act in some way. The Magi *had* to go see. Your epiphany may tie you to a resolution to *do* something differently than you've ever done before. Or maybe, you'll be open to the ways even one, single, unique-to-you word, can shape your life in 2021. Are you open to that?

Someone once said, "*I used to think the words spoken about us describe who we are, but now I know they shape who we are.*"

Words that describe may be static, but believing words shape direction and urge us to move give our stories legs. Perhaps the most significant line in all of Scripture is "*The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.*" (John 1:14) The word, or logos, speaks of the movement of God to the world in the person of Jesus – it speaks

¹ <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/newyearsrulins.htm>

not of a flat word to be read or viewed but a living word that moves, breathes, and shares in relationship with us like a good neighbor might. In this way, words can have a physical impact on a person. They can shape us.

Our congregational word of focus in 2020 was Vision. Do you remember? It shaped us without a doubt. You'll be receiving a Vision Packet this week... the fruits of the year-long labor of our congregation and Vision Team. We're excited and eager for you to receive it and to begin the shaping effort of what one word prompted in our congregation last year. Words shape us.

Words can harm us. A person can concuss with their words leaving a person dazed, confused, and writhing for a long time. We've seen this through the rise of bullying on social media. We've seen it in the rhetoric of politicians. We've maybe dished such words ourselves or received them with deep pain.

I've seen it in the eyes of a mother wanting affirmation from her grown children that she wasn't a total failure in raising them and her only hearing the opposite. I've seen it in the lowered head of a divorcee who can't overcome the mistakes that led to the separation and the cutting words of that failure that still dwell in his heart. It's in the words, "*You're fat.*" "*You're stupid.*" and a classmate who says, "*You can't play with me anymore because...*" I'll take the sticks and stones, thank you. Words can cut us deeply.

Words that shame lead us to behavior that shape the rest of our days. It's a pivotal part of the creation story in Genesis. God comes looking for Adam and Eve and can't find them. It's like when someone comes knocking on your door, and you're in your underwear – you hide. "*Where are you?*" God calls. Adam finally shows his face and says, "*Sorry, God. I heard you coming, and I hid because I was naked.*" God's first response is "*Who told you that you were naked?*" Before dealing with any sin or mistake or broken promise, God addresses the shame... for prior to their encounter with the serpent, Adam and Eve had no knowledge that they were naked or that such should be shameful. There was no basis in their understanding of shame. And God says, "*Who told you that you aren't ok?*" Words shape us.

Lots of power in this reality. Do you think about the power of your words? Do you tend to use them to shape something negative or something positive? The amazing thing is that I can picture the faces of people in my life, and even their lips moving in slow motion, as they said things to me that have truly altered the course of my life.

There was such a moment for Peter when he and the disciples were on the move with Jesus. The disciples were an interesting, motley crew of sorts, starting to create a bit of reputation for themselves. It's like that singer-songwriter who is on the rise, and people begin talking about him or her. In the van after the show, the artist and crew read the tweets – "*What are they saying about us?*" one inevitably asks. "*One says you're the*

next Woody Guthrie.” Another post says, “He writes like Jason Isbell and sings like Bruno Mars.”

Jesus knows the disciples get caught up in this stuff. After all, they are the same bunch arguing among themselves about who is the greatest disciple. Jesus asks, *“What’s the buzz out there among the people.”* They start firing back – *“They are saying you are the likes of Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets – even JtB.”* (which is how I assume they referred to John the Baptist naturally). Jesus says, *“Interesting... what do you think?”* And this is the moment we all must face, right? It’s easy to say what others have to say about Jesus... or even regurgitate what we read in Scripture. You can give insight into all the political candidates, but there’s that pressing moment of – *“But who’s the one you’re willing to put your name behind?”* Who do you say that Jesus is? It’s hard to fully imagine the moment. Was there any pause? We can’t really know for sure. What we know is that Peter is the one who has the courage to speak it: *“I’ll just say it. You’re the Messiah, Jesus.”*

What follows is a slow-motion moment that Peter could surely recall any time he closed his eyes in the future. Whenever he needed the reminder, he could close his eyes and see Jesus say to him -- *“Blessed are you, Pete, and I tell you what – you are the rock upon which this movement can be built. Here’s the keys to the kingdom.”*

Now Jesus wouldn’t expect perfection. Peter is the same guy, who Jesus called *“Satan,”* and the guy who denied even knowing Jesus when pressed in a tense moment. He was the guy who would later struggle with kosher laws and wrestle with who should be invited to connect with Christ and who shouldn’t be. Peter didn’t have an easy road or always make the right choice, but Jesus knows the character of this man and shapes Peter with the gift of this word: *“You are a rock. I believe in you.”* Jesus isn’t ‘blowing sunshine’ at Peter (as someone put it) when he says this. Jesus is calling something out from inside of Peter.

If we’re all created in God’s image with some distinct and unique giftedness to embody God’s love in the world, then it’s fair to wonder if God is always trying new ways to draw that light out of each of us. Maybe God speaks a meaningful word into our lives to fill us up enough to help us change the world regardless of our shortcomings. God calls us his beloved. *“Who told you, you were naked? You’re my beloved.”* God is banking on us seeing ourselves as beloved rather than thinking of all the reasons we aren’t.

One word. One phrase of encouragement has great power to shape us. When said by the right person, that shaping can impact the movement and activity in the world in extraordinary ways. And here’s the most intriguing part: *you* are the right person. Yep. *You.* I’m looking at you... right now... through your very screen.

It’s all over Scripture. The most unexpected voices are the ones who have shaped the story more than any. Why wouldn’t you want to be a part of helping shape the world by

sharing a positive word with someone else? We often choose negative words when we feel like we are losing control. I heard a pastor once say that the root of sin is the desire for control. The root of control is fear. We fear most the thought that we have no control. In those moments we feel as if we are losing a competition. Life, however, is more about connecting with people than it is about competing with them.

I had a good chat with my Dad this past week. It is always a time that fills me. I don't have to be Pastor Mark or have the right answers or fear asking a dumb question. There is no competition – only love. I can quickly recall moments with my Dad throughout my life where he put his hands on my shoulders, his forehead to my own, and he offered a word that shaped me in some important way. Whether it was a route to run he whispered in my ear playing football in the backyard as a kid, or before stepping out of the cluttered store room off the little First Church of the Nazarene sanctuary across town to say “*I do*” to the love of my life – those moments with him I treasure and have shaped my life. My Dad retired from ministry five years ago now. Whenever I visit, at some point, we end up in his home office that holds an amazing library of ministry related, and non-ministry related, books. It's an amazing collection of words. My first visit after he retired, I made the familiar trek up the stairs behind him to see the office that now also housed his collection of books that were from his church office. Dad, being the methodical man he is, walked me through each section – he's a bit detailed – and there were resources upon resources – leadership lessons on cassette tapes (remember cassette tapes) – entire collections of periodicals. He has a massive collection of our denominational magazine that was put out regularly for years. He randomly pulled out an issue from 1982 and flipping through opened to a page that pictured Broadway's own Don Lanier, who submitted an article for that particular edition. Dad had commentaries and literary works of art and on and on. He offered me any and all of it. After all, what good is a word that sits on a shelf if it's not made flesh in some way?

I was honestly a bit overwhelmed. I love books and have in my own home and church office libraries of books from other pastors and mentors, who have passed along books with words that have shaped their lives. Honestly, I looked around that room with my Dad and thought, these words shaped the man before me... the same man who would put his forehead to mine and drop a word of wisdom that may very well have originated from one of these works. What could I possibly take from this library? I was really pretty frozen. And Dad wasn't pressing. He just wanted me to know it was there should I ever have need.

The reality of transport space in the minivan we had at the time was also an issue as we were hauling back a week's worth of luggage for five people and an inflatable Paw Patrol ball pit that the grandparents felt our four-year-old must have at that time. I thanked my father without having to – he knew how I felt. I told him I'd keep calling on him for resources as needs arise and I certainly have. When I had packed the van on New Year's Day to leave with my little family utilizing the benefit of years of Tetris

mastery to fit it all in the vehicle, I said to my dad: “*Pops – I’ve been thinking about your library – truly amazing. I’m honestly a bit overwhelmed by all the words – where do you start?*” Then I asked him knowing I’d have some windshield time to think about it: “*Instead of this library of words that I can’t begin to consume right now, what is **one** word you’d give me to dwell on as we move into the New Year?*” With a brief pause of reflection, he looks at me and says, “*Integration.*”

That was his parting word. I thought about that word as I thought about all the changes of his life in that year. Here’s a man, I thought, who has given his life to Christ in service to the church – I’m learning more every day the challenge and gift of that calling. He’s now retired from that work though the calling never leaves. He helped see my beloved grandparents to the end of their earthly lives with dignity that same summer. He had two new grandkids on the way. His word to me? *Integration*. How does a library of words, 45 years of ministry and marriage, a journey with thousands of church members, and a God who calls him “*beloved child*” all integrate to create a meaningful existence in *this* moment, and the *next* moment, *this* afternoon and Monday morning? How does all that you have been, all that you’ve learned, all the success and challenge contribute to a fully integrated life? That’s what he was pondering as he waved goodbye to a mini-van full of his own flesh and blood on New Year’s Day 2016.

You are sitting here today with your own questions about 2021. Some relief perhaps. More than a few of us have said, “*I can’t wait to see 2020 come to an end.*” It was a full year with heartbreak and loss and challenge for so many of us. But can it all shape us in a meaningful way? Can we integrate all we have experienced to somehow make this New Year as meaningful as possible?

My friend says, “*You can get bitter or you can get better.*” We all know that bitter taste life can feed us. We do have a choice, however, with how we move forward in this moment.

The other word I can hear my father say is “*Simplify.*” We can anxiously bite off 33 New Year Rulin’s and quickly be overwhelmed in the management of it all. We can also start simply with one thing that might shape us. Even one word, when wrapped in love and prayed upon for clarity and direction can open us in ways we cannot yet imagine.

Such is why you have the opportunity to opt-in to have a single word drawn at random for you as part of this virtual worship service today. You certainly don’t have to. And this is not fortune cookie magic. It is simply an invitation to simplify – start with one word that is unique to you – pray and reflect on that word this year and see how it might shape you in ways you otherwise might not experience without your attention to its potential in your mind, body, and spirit.

There are no two words alike in the pool drawn from today. How can you opt in? The first and simplest way is to send us a text message. Grab your phone if you’re not

already scrolling the social memes, stop, and text “BroadwayCC” to 94000. You can see that prompt on the screen now which will remain through the end of the service. To be clear, in the body of your text, simply type BroadwayCC. In the “To:” line where you usually enter someone’s mobile number, enter the number 94000 or 94,000. You will then receive a simple reply with a link that will ask for your name and email address. If there are multiple people in your household that would like their own word, please put each person’s name in the “First Name” line. That’s it! A simple text and you’re in. If you’re not a texter, that’s fine. Call the church office and leave a message for Ingrid or send an email to Ingrid at the church office. Our pastoral team will draw a card for you at random based on the order your text is received, offer a blessing over you and your word and drop it in the mail so you can get it in a few short days. Oh, the anticipation!

May this word be yours. May it remind you that you are God’s beloved child, created on purpose, with purpose, for purpose. Peter’s word was ‘rock’ that he might never forget he was strong enough to build into, and shape, the movement of God. Receive it in love. Don’t discard it immediately as inapplicable to your situation but offer it space to grow in and through you if even requiring an acquired taste. Study it. Look up its meaning, its origin, and its synonyms. Watch for it as you move about the world. Let it shape you. So... here’s to 2021. Wash your teeth if you have any, and let love do what love does... even in one, single, blessed word.

Song of Response
“Words That Shape Us”
Words and Music: Ed Varnum
with Galatians 5:22-23 and 1 Peter 2:9

Refrain

There are words that shape us, to lead us and lift us,
words that inspire us to all that we can be.
There are words that call us to mission that invites us
to learn and grow and live new possibility.

Galatians 5:22-23

1. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace,
patience, kindness, faithfulness, and generosity,
gentleness, and self-control.

Fruit of the Spirit, inspire what we can be.

1 Peter 2:9

2. You are chosen, a royal priesthood.
You are a holy nation, precious in God’s sight,
in order to proclaim the mighty acts of God,
who calls you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Refrain

There are words that shape us, to lead us and lift us,
words that inspire us to all that we can be.
There are words that call us to mission that invites us
to learn and grow and live new possibility.



Star Word

To get your Star Word for the year:

Via Text: *BroadwayCC* (in message body of text)
to phone #: 94000. You will get a reply link, click
on it to leave your name and mailing address.
For multiple people at the same address, add
each name in the "First Name" line.

Via email:
iluckenbill@broadwaychristian.net

Via QR Code: shown to the left

Via Phone: 573-445-5312

NOTE: When texting to 94000, please give your email address
instead of your mailing address.