



but history bears this tendency out consistently over human history. Connecting—not being alone—is worth taking the risk of a beating. We need each other very badly indeed.

Our Lord is the Word that became Flesh, and He did this in order to bridge the gap between God and man. Just by becoming human he had to suffer the pains and difficulties of a normal human life in a fallen world, and in addition to that he went through extreme torture. He went through that in order to span the gap between us and God. He too—like the prisoners in a concentration camp--saw relationship with us to be well worth suffering for.

Not only are words the glue that binds us together in relationship with others (without which we fall apart and even die), but words are essential to nearly everything we need to find our way in this world. The word of the Lord, the scriptures say, is a light unto our path. Light allows us to see our path, to see where to step and where not to step and what direction to go in. It helps us avoid stepping into holes or walking off a cliff edge we wouldn't be able to see in the dark. Very much like that, just about everything that helps us find our way in life involves words. It is with words that we are able to ask questions, and it is with words that we give answers. It is with words that we explain, teach, warn, inspire, express gratitude, joke, encourage, ask forgiveness, and grant forgiveness.

Words are also the vehicle through which God created the universe. He spoke our world into existence. Words are the vehicle of His creative power. And—incredibly--God has shared that power with us. It is with words of reason and logic that an attorney makes the argument that saves his client's life. And it is with words that a Robert Frost or a Shakespeare crafts beauty. It is through words that we have the ability to create stories, poems, and songs, with words that we tell of our experiences, with words that we create charters of government, make wedding vows, write instructions, and make jokes. Both types of human creativity—the logical left-brain type and the artistic and emotive right-brain type—use the vehicle of words. I think this is one reason why Genesis includes the detail of Adam being given the role of naming the types of animals. Whether he was naming the horse "Bob" (as one might affectionately do) or "Thunder Beast"--we are not told, and it is likely not the point. The point, I think, is that God graciously and incredibly shared the gift of language with us, endowing us with this ability to create meaning, clarity, and beauty—all the things that language makes possible.

Finally, words are powerful. Life and death, the scriptures say, are in the power of the tongue, and the scriptures are not kidding. We can nurture and build others up with our words, and we can destroy with our words. Words are a powerful force and require care. They are a bit like a nuclear power plant. One nuclear power plant can provide all the heat needed for multiple cities for an entire winter; it could also instead, if mishandled, annihilate every one of those cities. We can be remarkably careless with words. All of us can remember things said to us that (intentionally or not) injured us, leaving marks which are still with us. All of us (I hope), however, also remember a few golden and treasured moments in our lives when someone said just the right to us at just the right time, and those words mean the world to us.

And one of the greatest things of all about this powerful gift of words God has given us is that we don't have to be super-eloquent to use them well. Something as simple as speaking to someone by name can mean a great deal, for on some level it lets them know that someone notices them, someone remembers who they are. If we suddenly find ourselves dumped in a large city where no one knows us, it can make us feel not only lonely but can make us feel like we don't even exist. But the moment someone meets us, remembers us the next day, and speaks

to us by name, we know we exist. Therefore, saying "Hi, John!" has more of a divine and transcendent spark in it than we think. A sentence as basic as "Ellen, you were a hero today!" can build people up more than we guess. Such sentences tell people, at some level, conscious or unconscious, that they are noticed and valued—things without which (whether quickly or slowly) we die but which--when present—make life flourish.

A final everyday example: Imagine a group of strangers at the end of a long day of travel, standing on the sidewalk waiting for the airport shuttle to arrive. Everyone is stressed and bored and generally used up. Then, bizarrely, especially because it's 11:00 at night, the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile drives by. After a pause, someone says, "Well, I guess we're not in Kansas anymore." Everyone laughs. Instantly some of that weariness and tension evaporates, and we enjoy the shared connection and feel less like strangers (hey, we all knew the quote!). The change is like a small miracle. And it is one.