

Reverend Lotwina Farodoye

Christ Church West Wimbledon 15th February 8am and 10am

Sermon Title: Living From the Father's Affirming Love

Bible Readings: Matthew 17:1–9 and 2 Peter 1:16–21

Sunday Next Before Lent

Introduction

If you've ever watched a small child do something simple, jump off the bottom stair, draw a picture, kick a ball, you'll notice something that many of them do.

The moment they finish, they look at you. They're not asking for technical feedback. They're not looking for improvement advice. They're looking at your face.

They want your smile.
They want your delight.
They want you to say, "Well done!"

And to be honest, many of us never really grow out of that.

Can you remember a time when someone important to you said to you, "*I'm proud of you*"? Maybe it was a parent. Perhaps a teacher or a friend? It possibly made you feel just that little bit taller, uplifted, even more motivated, ready to face the world.

Or perhaps, it's something you longed to hear but rarely did?

Why do those words matter so much? There is something inside us that longs to know; am I loved? am I accepted? Is someone pleased with me?

Today in our Gospel reading, we stand on a mountain with Peter, James, and John and hear God say the most powerful words to Jesus;

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him"

In our New Testament reading Peter recalls that moment and repeats those same words which impacted him so deeply.

And those words were not a one-off comment from God.

A few weeks ago we read how God spoke these same words to Jesus at his baptism, before His ministry began. Before Jesus preached a sermon, healed the sick, or performed a miracle, the Father said: “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.” Not because Jesus earned it. Not because He proved Himself but simply because He is God’s beloved Son and God’s pleasure is rooted in relationship.

Jesus began His ministry having been affirmed by God.

2. “With Him I Am Well Pleased”, Not Once, But Again

Now, at the Transfiguration, after Jesus has encountered opposition, misunderstanding, and the announcement of suffering, the Father says it again.

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him”.

And that affirmation strengthens Jesus for the road ahead, the road to suffering on the cross. Sometimes when we are suffering, we might be tempted to think that God doesn’t love us or we’ve done something wrong but nothing is further from the truth.

3. Words Shape Souls

We know how powerful words are. It is interesting isn’t it. We were taught as children: *“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”* But that simply isn’t true.

Illustration during the sermon

Can you see I’m holding up a fresh, flat sheet of white paper. Smooth, clean and uncreased. Now imagine speaking harsh, cutting, belittling words. I am now scrunching the piece of paper into a ball, tightly in my hand. Harsh words spoken can have that effect on a person. They can make the recipient feel smaller, diminished, and can paralyze. Even when you open up the ball of paper again and try to smooth it back out it’s not the same. You can flatten it carefully. But the creases remain.

Careless criticism, angry emails sent too quickly, sarcasm disguised as humour, sharp words spoken in frustration can cause damage. But loving, affirming words can steady a soul. They can give courage. They can strengthen someone for their cross or during suffering, and we never know from looking at the surface what people might be going through. In the book of proverbs we are told that

“Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up”
Proverbs 12 vs 25 to 28 NRSVA

When God the Father speaks over Jesus, He is not crushing, He is strengthening. And if affirmation strengthened the Son in His humanity, how much more do we need it?

4. Receiving the Father’s Love Ourselves

Thankfully in Christ, we too are called beloved by God. Not because we are flawless. Not because we always get it right. But because we belong to Him. We are God’s beloved children, joint heirs with Jesus.¹

But some of us struggle to receive love. Affirmation feels unfamiliar. Compliments are deflected. Kindness feels uncomfortable.

Today, hear this gently: Receive the love God gives you. Let it sink in. Even if you are not used to hearing affirming words, believe as Gods child that you are truly loved.

5. Listen to Him, And Speak Like Him

The Father says, “Listen to Him.” If we listen to Jesus, we will begin to speak like Him. Jesus: Spoke truth with grace, Restored the fallen, Strengthened the weary. We are called to do the same.

A Lenten Invitation: Practicing Affirming Love

As Lent begins next week, I encourage us to think about we might become more like Jesus. Here are five simple practices that we might consider adopting during lent that naturally flow from today’s scripture readings:

1. Receive the Love of God Daily

¹(Romans 8 vs 17)

Each morning, pause and say:

"I am loved by God. In Christ, I am His beloved." Don't rush it. Don't argue with it. Let it sink in gently reminding ourselves of whose we are, and who we are in Christ as oppose to some of the things we might say or think e.g; *"I got out of the wrong side of bed", "I'm so clumsy, I'm such an idiot, I didn't I do x, y, z, I'm not looking forward to....."*

2. Fast from Harsh Words

Give up cutting remarks. Give up sarcasm that wounds or sly digs. Give up impatience that spills out carelessly. Refuse to scrunch up someone else's heart

3. Pause Before You Press Send

Before sending that angry email, re-read it slowly. Ask yourself: *"Is this kind? Is this necessary? Is this clear?"* If unsure, sense-check it with someone wise whom you trust.

4. Practice Saying Sorry

If your words have left creases in someone's heart, Lent is a beautiful time to mend. *"I'm sorry." "I shouldn't have said that." "I was a bit hasty there." "Will you forgive me?"* Humility heals. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make amends.

5. Intentionally Speak Life

Don't just fast from harshness, feast on encouragement. Affirm and encourage those around you. Thank them, bless them. Vocalise the good thing you're thinking. Build someone up. Let's help to smooth out creases instead of creating them.

The Father didn't keep His pleasure silent. Neither should we.

Conclusion: Living From the Voice That Matters Most

Jesus walks toward the cross strengthened by the voice of Gods love.

As we enter Lent, may we walk toward the cross strengthened by that same love. Receive it. Believe it. Live from it. And let our words and actions reflect it. Amen.