

Talk in everlasting words, and dedicate them all
to me.
And I will give you all my life, I'm here if you
should call to me.
You think that I don't even mean a single word I
say.
It's only words, and words are all I have, to
Steal your heart away. *The Bee Gees "Words"*

"WORDS"

John 18:15-18, & 25-27; 21:15-17

Words. Words. Words!

Eyes never meeting, glancing over her shoulder to finish a conversation with a teenage male employee whose lust level seemed rather high, and then, ... again without looking: "D'ya want a bag? ... followed soon afterwards by "Have a nice day!"

Right! If she had to identify me in a line-up I would be off scott-free. "Have a nice day, my bunions!" The sincerity quotient had dipped below zero. The right words, but nothing other than a titillating response to another young person's hormones! Do you ever weary of insincerity? Does it ever bother you that people don't say what they mean? I think Miss Care-not Cashier really wanted to say: "I wish there weren't so many customers right now so I could spend more time talking to Ronnie Romance. And, incidentally, you with the bananas - you are one of them. An interruption to my courtship".

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Sometimes we use words when we don't mean them. Sometimes we *should* use words, because as Fuzion sang the BeeGee's lyrics to "Words" it seems that many times they are the only tool we have to "steal your heart away".

I remember a very powerful time in my life when words needed to be spoken, and I struggled so hard to let them out.

A woman friend much older than me, I'll call her Doreen, was lying in hospital. The prognosis wasn't good. Cancer had virtually taken over Doreen's body, and bit by bit she was shutting down. Doreen and I had been friends for years. I mean, really good friends. During those last weeks I made a point of getting in to see her as often as possible. Reading material, for when she felt up to read, treats when she was able to eat. I even took a plant in, an Easter Lily that the nurses made me take home because of the hospital's scent-free policy.

Before her sickness, we'd done lots of things together and in some ways she was as much 'family' as my own flesh and blood family. I think Doreen thought the same way about me. She had been an only child.

One day, driving away from the hospital, it dawned on me that I had never said "I love you" to Doreen. I confess I am very hesitant to say anything like that in case it is taken the wrong way. (I'm

even wary of signing a greeting card 'with love' in case it is misunderstood.) I am probably overly-cautious, but I do know of some who might think that a single man shouldn't live alone, and the "love you" might signal something I don't mean.

Well, Doreen and I had spent so many good times together that I decided that the next time I would verbalize my love for her. So, the next visit, Doreen had become very weak, and she listened more than talked. Finally I said "I'll be praying for you Doreen, and I'll be back soon." A little peck on the cheek, and then I walked out of the door.

As I walked along the corridor my inner voice whispered to me: "Warren, you're a coward, just a big coward. You didn't tell Doreen you loved her. Now, use your head! What's she going to do? Unhook all the tubes and come running after you?" I went back. I walked in the room and said "Doreen, I hope you know I love you." She smiled weakly, and said "I know. I love you too."

That was the last time I saw Doreen alive.

Words. So carelessly thrown to the wind. Words, so agonizingly difficult to speak. Words that mean so little. Words that mean so much. Words that cost little to say. Words that take us past the parameters of our comfort. Words that hurt. Words that heal. Words that can never be taken back, once said. Words that will be treasured in someone's heart forever.

I enjoy weddings. Usually I have to stifle my emotions during the vows, especially. Thankfully I'm so busy secretly passing a clean, folded tissue to the bride, and sometimes to the groom, and trying to keep track of where I am in the liturgy that I don't have to use a handkerchief for myself. Somehow the sight of a 6 foot 2, 235 pound pastor in his finest white ecclesiastical regalia blubbering and sniffing doesn't add a great deal to the sanctity of the moment.

But, there *is* something about two people committing their lives to one another that *is* moving. I am definitely a closet romantic. I even prefer romances to action films.

Chick flicks may be the primary domain of women, but I have known some men to wipe a little moisture from their nose at particularly points in a romance film. (Yes, noses! Maybe you women didn't know that in order to disguise their supposed lack of manliness, men cry through their nose? Somehow they suck it all back from their tear ducts and redirect it through their sinuses into their nose! So, one way to detect if your male friend is being moved is if he blows his nose a lot during the film.

Listen to these vows. Maybe you've said them:

In the presence of God and before these witnesses, I Philip, take you Mary, to be my wife

to have and to hold
from this day forward,
for better, for worse;
for richer, for poorer;
in sickness and in health;
in joy and in sorrow;
to love and to cherish,
as long as we both shall live.
This is my solemn vow.

Wow! Words! Behind these words is a lifetime of commitment. I have spent time with these people, both young and old, first-timers, widows and widowers, refugees from failed marriages. I have looked into sparkling eyes as we've discussed the wedding and have watched as they take every opportunity to touch, to snuggle, to reassure one another of their love. These are powerful words.

I have listened to the vows that have been written by the couple, and have wondered at the beauty. And, I have led in less traditional vows like:

I, John join you Martha in life-long covenant, to laugh with you in joy, to grieve with you in sorrow; to grow with you in love; to care with you for others; to be faithful to you alone as long as we both shall live.

But not all vow-makers keep their vows, or are able to keep their vows, or choose to keep their vows. Words! Words spoken by hand-holding shiny –eyed people suddenly don't have the meaning they once had, for whatever reason (and there are many), The Vanier Institute released Canada's divorce rate figures as of October 4, 2010. Forty percent of all marriages now in Canada end in divorce. Do the math. That's just ten percent better than one in two marriages that last. What happened? What became of those shiny eyes and secretive nudges, and toes-ies under the table?

Before the reading that Lucie delivered so beautifully earlier, our man Peter in today's Bible lesson had adamantly made his vows to Jesus. Yes, they were only words, but I believe (like every couple I've married) that at the time Peter really meant them. There, at what we now call The Lord's Supper we hear Peter's vows. Listen for those promises.

Jesus is saying:

"During this very night, all of you will reject me, as the Scriptures say, 'I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I am raised to life, I will go to Galilee ahead of you"

Peter spoke up, "even if all the others reject you, I never will."

Jesus replied, "I promise you that before a rooster crows tonight you will say three times that you don't know me". But Peter said "Even if I have to die with you, I will never say I don't know you." Matthew 26:31b – 35a CEV

Oh my! Words! Words so full of love and loyalty! At that moment I am sure that Peter really meant that come hell or high water, Jesus could depend on him. Forget the others. They might be fickle, but not Peter. He would be true blue to his Leader, Jesus. Hadn't they been through so much before this? – the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah; trying to walk on water on the Sea of Galilee; being saved from drowning two seconds later; being told that he was a rock, one solid enough for Jesus to build His church on, and so much more. How could Peter even think of denying knowing his master? And yet?

Before that very night was over, Peter *did* deny knowing Jesus. In fact we are told he was vehement about it, swearing. How could he move from full affirmation to denial in less than 24 hours.

Words! Words! Words!

Once again words come into play in the scene by the seashore after Jesus has risen from the dead. As the disciples come in from fishing to a breakfast Jesus has prepared, He singles Peter out – I'm sure much to his embarrassment. Jesus asks Peter three times --- THREE times --- if he loves Him. Peter replies "yes, of course I do". The third time he's emphatic as he says "Lord you know everything. You know I love You."

And the penny drops. His inner ear hears the Rooster crow. Peter figures it out. Three denials. Three questions. And each time Jesus replies with "well then, do something about it. Feed my Lambs. Feed my Sheep ...

In "My Fair Lady" Eliza Doolittle sings:

Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words
I get words all day through
First from him, now from you
Is that all you blighters can do
Don't talk of stars burning above
If you're in love show me

Tell me no dreams filled with desire
If you're on fire show me
Here we are together in the middle of the night
Don't talk of spring, just hold me tight
Anyone who's ever been in love'll tell you that
This is no time for a chat

Don't talk of love lasting through time
Make me no undying vow
Show me now!!

Words! There is a time for words. In Doreen's case, years of action had preceded words. There also is a time for action that is wrapped in those words. Behind every undying vow is a "show me." Jesus gave Peter another chance to prove his loyalty, as He gives each of us another chance ... and sometimes it is another, and another, and another ... by reminding us our that actions are speaking much louder than our words. The sound of our footsteps drowns out our speech. Our words are hollow and so easily negated, despite shiny eyes and hand-holding wonder. We *can* do something to fill those words with substance. As deeply sincere as they may seem at the moment, the words can only be "whole" when action validates them.

The most complete word that I know of is *the* Word. Not the Bible. *THE* Word, Jesus Himself. John started his Gospel by saying "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." That's the complete word: the spoken assurance filled with the activity that is God. It's on this solid foundation that we can depend. Others' words may be empty, insincere, unreliable and deceptive. But God's words fulfilled in *the* Word will never let us down. Never. No, never!

I would like the singing of our final hymn "How Firm a Foundation" to be part of this Lesson for Life as we wrap these thoughts together as we head into the new week with confidence. Look for the phrases: "What more can I say than to you I have said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled" ... and "That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

"I'll never, no, never, no never forsake." Those are words founded on the Word that we can count on! Forever! Amen!