

Learning to See with Our Ears

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. I wasn't really sure how you folks did this each week. And I feel a little bit bad about my title because I think if I had read my own title, which was, as I recall, Learning to Listen to God in a Culture Full of Noise, I would have come because I would have hoped that the author would have been planning to give me advice about how to go about actually living my life such that I had more time to listen to God. And I'm not actually going to talk about how to do this. What I'm going to talk about today comes out of a book that I've been working on for the last few years. I'll explain a little bit about the sort of argument in the book. But the section that I'd like to go through is from the very end of it. And it's, the part that we'll talk about today is more not how do we go about creating space in our lives to listen to God, but how we ought to begin to think about why we need to listen to God. That's what I'm going to do. Okay? And I'm assuming we have about 45 minutes or an hour. An hour total or? An hour plus 20 minutes question.

Okay. Alright, good. Well let me just go over the argument of the book briefly. Now the title is important because the title kind of describes the gist of this thing. It's called Dialogue, Catalogue, and Monologue. And then the subtitle is Personal, Impersonal, and Depersonalizing Ways to Use Words.

And basically I've used these three words, Dialogue, Catalogue, and Monologue, to advance a three-part argument. First, suggesting a dialogue which is to say, basically, conversation for the sake of communion.

Although this is the primary purpose of words and speech, it has been all but overwhelmed in our own culture by the impersonal language of what I call catalog, which is the language of technology, of science, of management, of engineering, of whatever.

Basically a kind of abstract and technical language has eclipsed personal conversation, personal dialogue in modern times.

[3 : 09] Now as this has happened, quite a bit of social space has opened up for the insurgency of what I call monologue, which is increasingly willful and manipulative speech.

Speech designed to be a speech. Speech designed to flatter, speech designed to sell, speech designed to manipulate, to cajole, to move people in certain directions.

Speech designed to make sense. Now as we've grown used to this manipulative speech, this monologue, I think we've become increasingly incapable of listening to each other.

And what is more significant, we've become increasingly incapable of listening for the voice of God. And so the third part of the argument is simply to contend that we have to resist this development, this eclipse of personalizing speech.

[4 : 17] And that we have to somehow try to pull the posture of dialogue back out from beneath the burden of catalog and monologue.

For speaking and listening out of the posture of genuine dialogue is necessary for fellowship, and fellowship both with each other and with God is the deepest desire of our hearts.

But to successfully pull the dialogue out from beneath the burden, this will require more than simply that we recognize the need to do this, it's going to require a recovery of a theology, a theology of dialogue.

And this is what I'm going to talk about today. And this is what I'm going to talk about today. Okay, so my apologies, but this section that we're dealing with today comes out of a larger argument.

Now, it's interesting, but many of the people who have most constructively criticized the confused and manipulative quality of contemporary culture have very often done so in the name of the of a, for lack of a better word, a thought tradition, which we are still perhaps vaguely familiar.

[5 : 50] And this is the predominantly auditory and pertain to hearing world picture. That's not quite the right word to use because it's not a world view now.

But the predominantly auditory world of biblical theology. Now, there are a number of reasons for this. But one of the more important is that this theology, this biblical theology does not understand the business of knowing, primarily in terms of seeing, but rather in terms of listening. And consequently, the emphasis is placed upon speaking and acting on the basis of what one has heard.

Now, this is not to say that the authors of scripture ignore the significance of seeing. For many of them speak on the basis of what they have seen. And the scriptures are very full of profound pictures of the human situation.

But, relative to the classical, philosophical, and modern emphasis upon sight and seeing, the prophets and apostles are much more concerned that we should listen.

[7 : 15] Indeed, they assert that it will only be, as we become sensitive to the voice of God, that we will be able to begin to see things as they really are.

And Martin Luther summed this up very well, and I use this in my title. And, in the book, we must learn to see without ears.

Now, the difference between modern and biblical understanding is perhaps nowhere more clearly evident than in the different ways the true traditions conceive of the importance and purpose of words.

And ultimately, in the difference of the difference of the importance of logos or the word. Within the classical world picture, classical philosophical worldview, upon which the modern worldview is largely based, the logos pertains to the order of things, the larger order of the universe.

[8 : 27] And it refers to the ultimate principle of being, and the animation of being. And from the classical perspective, this primeval logos is not a spoken word.

And neither is it heard, so much as it is perceived within the mind's eye of rational speculation or reflection.

Now, to be sure, the logos of classical philosophy is a dynamic concept, and yet it is wholly impersonal. Within the classical tradition, one does not expect to encounter the universe personally, as, say, when one encounters another or is addressed by another in dialogue.

Rather, one does not expect to encounter the universe, rather, one does not expect to see the eternal order of things, and, if possible, comprehend it.

The universe is thus pictured within the philosophical imagination as a closed system at rest, and grounded, ultimately, in an eternal but impersonal principle of order.

[9 : 50] Now, it's hardly surprising, then, that the metaphors and morals that the classical tradition has used to represent our knowledge of what is are largely visual and spatial.

So, I mean, these words are familiar with these words, insight, this theory. I mean, if we could make a long list of these, these all pertain to seeing.

Okay? Now, modern thinkers have tended to point this older classical view in a more activist direction, but they have remained very largely committed to its predominantly visual orientation. And so, whereas classical thinkers have had hoped to be able to behold the order of things through rational reflection, modern thinkers have sought to disclose the underlying structure of things by way of active and often violent methods of inquiry.

Modernity has thus placed the actively inquiring mind in the middle of a world of objects that passively wait to be illuminated, inspected, named, and ultimately used.

[11 : 15] Modernity has thus, in the modern picture of the world, therefore, is not one in which we aspire simply to behold the light of the Logos shining through things, as much as it is a picture in which we strive to direct the beam of enlightened intellect onto things in order to elucidate their inner workings for the sake of putting things to use.

Modernity has thus, in the modernity of the world, and the modernity of the world, and the modernity of the world. Now, the biblical tradition conceives of things very differently. While the Bible also understands being primarily in terms of words, the principal stress is upon hearing and speaking them for the sake of the covenants they establish.

Persons and personal speech lie at the heart of biblical understanding. And along this line, the primary scriptural emphasis is placed upon hearing and obeying the words that God speaks, Yahweh speaks.

For He is the one who spoke, and who continues to speak the creation into existence. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, the psalmist claims, there is swearing hope by the breath of His mouth.

For He spoke, and it came to be. He commanded, and it stood firm. Similarly, in the prologue to the fourth gospel, the apostle declares, In the beginning was the word, the logos.

[13 : 08] And the word was with God, and the word was God. And here John employs the classical philosophical term logos, but he radically reinterpretes and personalizes it after a characteristically Hebraic fashion.

He wants his hearers to understand that the order of things has been brought forth by a God who lives and acts and speaks.

Indeed, it is Yahweh's faithfulness to His own words that holds chaos at bay. And not simply the fact that things have somehow been endowed with the principle of being and order.

Furthermore, this living and speaking God has become flesh, and has dwells among us as a human person in the Christ.

But the apostle Paul adopts a similar apologetic strategy in his address to the Athenians. Paul begins by appealing to vague religious sentiment, but quickly moves on to proclaim a living God who creates, commands, calls, forgives, and who will ultimately judge the nations, quote, by the breath of his mouth.

[14 : 32] What the Athenians in Hitherto worship in new ignorance, Paul introduces as a God with whom it is possible to converse.

Indeed, within the biblical tradition, speaking, declaring, commanding, conversing, promising, and warning are God's most characteristic actions.

Yahweh's living, powerful presence in the world is thus not simply represented by the classical Logos concept, but also by the Hebrew word, Dabhar, which has a variety of meanings, all centered around the verb to speak.

Now, whoever has Dabhar, Thorlie Bowman, who is a scholar of languages, and this is out of a second book entitled, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek.

Whoever has Dabhar knows Yahweh. Dabhar is more than a fragment. It is more than an emanation or a hypostasis of the divinity.

[15 : 58] Rather, Dabhar, or the word in a sense, is a manifestation of Yahweh. And indeed the highest form of that manifestation.

Dabhar is Yahweh, as he is recognizable to mortal human beings. And so within the biblical tradition, the principal object of understanding at present is not necessarily to see, nor is it somehow to behold the eternal order of things, but rather it is to hear the voice of the one who has, by the brow of his mouth, spoken all things into being.

Adam is thus said to have heard God calling to him in the cool of the day. Abraham heard God's call to leave heaven and go to the land the Lord would show him.

Moses heard the voice from out of the burning bush. Elijah heard the gentle whispering voice near the mouth of the cave. Jesus does nothing on his own but speaks only of what the Father has taught him.

And each of us are called to repentance and faith in Christ on the basis of having heard the gospel proclamation. Indeed, the only possible relationship that we can now have with God is premised upon hearing his word.

[17 : 40] And responding in faith and obedience to what we have been enabled to hear. Because you have seen me, Jesus told Thomas the doubter, you have believed.

But blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. Now, Nellie Viennet, who is a French scholar, has written very beautifully along this line.

In an essay she wrote about Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, in a little article called The Voice and Hearing.

And I've read a couple of passages from this I'd like to read. As early as Genesis, God, for the creature, is only a voice that the eye cannot see, but that the ear can hear.

To hear him is to be saved, since it is to receive the efficacious, creative, and salvific word. Also, all the prophets themselves mix the hardening of sin, which makes one deaf to grace, and the hardening of the ears.

[18 : 54] Revelation is nothing other than the word made flesh. The place where the eye fails to unveil the divine incognito, well, the ear can discern the voice of the shepherd.

If anyone hears my voice. And from then on the role of man is clear. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

The ear is the channel to which revelation passes. It alone can, God willing, give the creature access to the spiritual universe.

It is still hearing that allows him to remain in this spiritual universe by witnessing. It is said, by confessing with his mouth that which was first heard and in turn in this action to hear.

And so faith comes from that which one hears. How will they know unless someone speaks to them? The disciple, the Christian, is therefore one who places himself within the sound of the word, and who for this reason transmits it using his own words.

[20 : 13] It is the circulation of human words, humble gift to the other, which assumes the life of the body of Christ. In their usage effect, the word of God can resound and thus perpetuate the divine gift.

Now that's from Nellie Vianney's article. Now, within the biblical tradition, moving on, we don't discover the Logos by means of philosophical reflection or empirical investigation so much as we find ourselves addressed by him.

This encounter is never simply an intellectual affair. It never arrives merely as information. Rather, the divine address penetrates the heart in such a way as to elicit a deeply personal response.

Either one of faith and obedience, or that of turning away and covering the ears. The word of God is living and active, the author of Hebrews writes along this line.

Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

[21 : 45] And the writer continues, By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

So, within the biblical tradition, we don't intuitively see the underlying order or principle of all things, as much as we believe and accept words that are spoken into our hearts.

Words that reveal the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Words that reveal the truth of all things, as we are. It is on the basis of these words alone that we are enabled to begin to see ourselves as we are, and to see the world as it is.

Hearing thus takes presence over seeing. And it is through words and speech that the truth of things is disclosed. The words that matter most, furthermore, are not those of catalogued information, and they are never those of manipulative monologue, relating back to earlier parts of this argument.

[23 : 08] But rather, they are the words of dialogue, of God's address to us. These words never return to the one who utters them without having accomplished everything that he desires.

And yet, they are the sorts of words that graciously permit the contingency of a genuinely personal response.

Now, the biblical theology of Dabhar, as we discussed it, has a number of critical implications for our understanding of the purpose of words and speech.

And it underscores the importance of assuming a dialogical posture, or a personal posture, with respect to words and speech. In the first instance, it suggests that speaking and listening are core elements of our actual experience as persons.

Well, these things are not simply biological and or sociological accidents that may or may not have anything to do with enabling us to apprehend the truth of things.

[24 : 22] On the contrary, this theology suggests that our capacity for speaking and listening, for dialogue, is precisely what links us most closely to God, the one who has spoken all things into being.

Indeed, speaking and listening have as solid a basis in being as it is possible to imagine. That we are able to enter into conversation with each other is evidence of our dignity as having been created after God's likeness and image.

In this passage, I will return to this point in a minute, but suffice it here simply to say that our capacity for dialogue is, according to biblical theology, perhaps God's greatest gift to us.

Now, the biblical theology of Dabhar also suggests that words and speech do not merely disclose the order of things, but rather they establish it.

This is important, for just as the biblical theology of Dabhar also suggests that the biblical theology of Dabhar is a very important thing. This is important, for just as this theology suggests that being rests upon the covenant that the one who spoke and continues to speak the world into existence has made to stand behind and to be true to his words.

[25 : 51] So the biblical tradition maintains that the stability and coherence of the world, in a sense, that we construct with our own words depends in large part upon the faithfulness with which we speak.

The biblical tradition, that our verbally created worlds have not collapsed into nothingness, in spite of our carelessness and deceitfulness, should not tempt us to believe that our words are of relatively little value.

Rather, the continuing existence of the world that we create as human beings, in spite of our carelessness, is another indication of God's ongoing commitment to his own words of creation, as well as of his long-suffering patience with us.

In his grace, God does not allow our situations to dissolve completely into the nothingness towards which empty words tend.

But, we shouldn't presume upon such grace for the place, if it can be called that, Now, this, I realize I've skipped a section that describes this, but just as davhar is the manifestation of God, the Hebrew also has another word called wo davhar, which is the way empty speech is described, So, translated literally as nothingness, as a speech that has no being.

[27 : 39] And, ultimately, the place of lo davhar, of this emptiness, is held. Now, moving on.

Fear is perhaps the most serious obstacle confronting our recovery of development today, and probably all of us.

We're afraid that if we speak truthfully, we will be... It's too revealing. It makes us too vulnerable with each other.

Yet, the world, the kind of world proclaimed in this biblical theology of davkar is one in which faithfulness and trustworthiness, which are core aspects of genuine dialogue.

Well, both of these are qualities that are underwritten by a God who cannot lie, and whose purposes cannot be thwarted, even by those who do lie.

[29 : 00] And this kind of conviction completely undermines the fearful temptation to believe that we cannot risk speaking truthfully.

Now, to say that the Amagurved Edo, or the image of God, and the human faculties of listening and speaking, find a basis in this theology of davhar, is not yet to tell the whole story.

However, for dialogue and dialogical existence have their foundation finally in God's triune and intra-communicative nature.

It is the revelation that Yahweh is and has always been one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, that ultimately grounds the possibility of dialogue.

This is of critical importance, for the word could not be said to be genuinely dialogical in the final analysis, or if in the final analysis God is alone as a speaker.

[30 : 17] Real communicative freedom and contingency, the core elements of genuine conversation, could not be real human possibilities had they not already existed in the conversations that have eternally united the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Now, along this line, Christian theology has understood the apostolic assertion that God is love, to be an ontological assertion, an assertion as to God's nature, and not simply that God is loving, it doesn't simply qualify God's existence.

Love is not something that God creates, but rather it is the essence of His existence. Love describes the basic qualities of the relations that have eternally united Father, Son, and Spirit.

Well, then the same can be true, must be said to be true of dialogue. Indeed, just as God is love, so we may also say that God is conversation.

The possibility of dialogue is not simply something that God has created, but rather dialogue describes His essentially intercommunicative nature.

[31 : 40] As Luther observed, God too, in His majesty and nature, is pregnant with a word, or a conversation, in which He engages with Himself in His divine essence, and which reflects the thoughts of His heart.

This is as complete and excellent and perfect as God Himself. Or as T.F. Torrance has written more recently, In His own eternal essence, God is not mute or dumb, but word, communicating or speaking Himself.

That is the word which we hear in the Holy Scriptures, and which works or affects in us through the Spirit, intuitive, auditive, and evident knowledge of God.

God's triune self-communication is the ground and grammar for all true communication.

God's triune self-indulgence is the ground and grammar for all true communication. Now, in referring to an earlier point, relating to the possibility of dialogue with the imago Dei or the image of God, we can say that what makes us truly human is precisely that we have been invited by God to enter into the kind of genuinely personal dialogue, the I and thou encounter, realized only in speaking and listening.

[33 : 21] We have been invited into this, this kind of genuine dialogue, that has eternally been shared by the Father with the Son and with the Spirit. Now, the Biblical theology of God, of the God who has spoken and continues to speak, God entails a world view, which is obviously not quite the right word because it's not a view, but it entails a way of thinking about being in which words are of paramount importance.

It is a world picture in which God's greatest joy is to speak to us and to enter into dialogue with us. It is also one in which the principal test of ourselves as human persons is the extent to which we own our words, stand behind them and are present in them before each other.

Words are the very stuff of our lives, and to back away from them, or to hold them at arm's length, is in a sense to back away from life itself.

Now, the Biblical world picture is also one in which the primary human task in the world is not to speak, but rather to listen.

[35 : 05] It is to listen for the voice of the living God and to respond faithfully and obediently to His address.

Along this line, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance that the authors of Scripture attach to listening. Again and again, the Prophets and Apostles implore us to listen to the voice of God.

The refrain, Shema, or listen, runs right through both Testaments. From Moses' recitation of Torah, it says, Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that they may go well with you.

To the psalmist's declaration, This is the mural right in the lobby or atrium at Regent College.

The entrance of your words gives light. To the urgently repeated prophetic entreaty, Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good.

[36 : 11] Give ear and come to me, hear me, that your soul may live. To Jesus' assertion, It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

To the apostolic exhortation, Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. And then finally, to the apocalyptic overture of the risen Christ, If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him and he with me.

Now, of course, there was a time when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, And what is clearly visible to all those who had eyes to see.

And there will also come a time when we will all see Him face to face. For the present, however, our knowledge of God, And hence of who we are before Him, Is attained primarily by hearing, And only very rarely by seeing.

In rather striking contrast to the visual bias of contemporary culture, Biblical theology announces that the truth of things is for the present, Something that can only be heard.

[37 : 43] Again, as Nellie Bionet puts it, Hearing is thus the privileged organ of sense, Which making possible the relation of God to man, Allows at the same time the fraternal relations of people one with another.

To forget this leads to a degeneration of language. That is to say, a cultural and religious crisis. To remember this hastens the coming of the new heaven, And of the new earth.

For there will no longer be weeping and gnashing and grieving, But deep harmony. Now, sadly, it seems that we have, in fact, as a culture, forgotten this.

And our forgetfulness has indeed led to the degeneration of language, And to cultural and religious crises of various kinds. We have all become, as Kierkegaard put it in Danish, Very frankly, we have all become doom.

That is, deaf and stupid with respect to hearing God's voice. The racket of empty, impersonal and depersonalized speech today has only made this problem worse.

[39 : 11] It has become very difficult for us to hear the voice of God in our culture today. But it would be mistaken simply to attribute our deafness to the noisiness of contemporary culture, As if the problem was somehow new and soluble simply by way of escape.

But rather the problem of human deafness may be said to be archetypal, With roots extending all the way back into the original fall from grace.

Reflecting on the Genesis account of Adam and Eve's original disobedience, Kierkegaard contended that sin is ultimately what accounts for our stubborn preference for the visible, And our continuing negligence with respect to listening.

Again, BNA recounts Kierkegaard's argument as follows. Evoking the lost paradise, Kierkegaard depicts the relation established by the Creator with humanity, His creatures, as a harmonious relation.

The word of God holds it. With all his being, man listens. It is said that he obeys, Since to hear and to obey is all one.

[40 : 41] And yet the fall arrived unexpectedly. A sudden deafness prevented man from hearing the word addressed to him. Has God really spoken to him?

And then doubt suddenly appeared. No longer recognizing the word, man no longer recognized himself. He no longer knew himself.

He entered the universe that seemed absurd to him. This perturbation of the primary auditory relation of obedience bent itself into a relation of opposition.

And the relation of love transformed itself, And deformed itself into an ego twisting in on itself. And so, although we haven't lost the capacity to love, In our fallen state, We have diverted love from its original object, And we love ourselves inordinately.

We haven't lost our capacity to know, Or to use our reason, Or to hear. But we have separated all of these things from love. We have diverted these capacities, And assigned failure or limitation to them.

[42 : 04] And the originally auditory relation, Kierkegaard describes, Has thus devolved into a kind of abstract conceptual relation.

Our reason no longer frees us from the appearances and illusions formed by the visual bias of speculative thought, But simply describes these appearances in ever greater detail, Reinforcing our dependence upon and captivity to them.

In effect, Our eyes have overcome our ears. Entirely reversing the original relation of hearing and seeing.

This reversal has left us captive to seeming, To appearances, To disparate comparison, Rivalry, Envy, And all of these things that dominate the present age.

The human condition may thus be described in terms of hypocrisy and idolatry. Hypocrisy severing what is said from the inner life of the one who speaks.

[43 : 19] And idolatry constraining our religious trust only in that which is visible and manipulable.

Now, The most damaging manifestation of the triumph of eye over ear, Is perhaps the willful determination to use the power of speech, Which is the essential medium of, as we've said, of spiritual existence.

To subvert the possibility of hearing the voice of God. It is to use words and language to evade, And to actively negate the possibility of listening and obeying.

This kind of subversion is ultimately demonic. And I have a short quotation here from a fellow named Ronald Hall, writing about this.

It says, The demonic individual avoids worldly bonds by turning the very resource for establishing these bonds, Namely words themselves, Into empty talk.

[44 : 36] Such empty talk, such prattle, conceals rather than reveals. It disintegrates. It disintegrates rather than integrates.

In this empty talk, this incessant talk, an ironic and deep silence is revealed. Here there is a retreat from the world by means of a subtle retreat from words.

A retreat accomplished by a constant detachment and absence of the speaker from the words he uses, he utters.

And here the demonic individual gushes forth with words. He waxes eloquent in poetry and lyricism. And his rhapsody is as seductive as music.

Indeed this is because his words have become, in effect, music. Since they've come to entertain them. But in all this sound and fury, nothing is said.

[45 : 37] And here the speaker flees from himself, from freedom, from integrity, from presence, from continuity, from every worldly bond, by flirting with the very means through which these find their concrete actualization.

Namely, speech itself. Now our culture has become full of empty words.

In effect, it's full of musical speech. And I think this indicates a desperate indifference to responsible personal existence.

In fact, in spite of its apparent fullness, the noisiness of contemporary culture discloses a profound emptiness. A kind of sonic desert within which genuinely personalizing speech may from time to time be voiced, but can hardly be heard because it's so quickly drowned out by the ubiquitous din. Our situation recalls the prophecy of Amos. The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land.

[47 : 01] Not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Now the sense of the text is not that the words are not there to be heard, but rather that we would have become incapable of hearing them, because it has simply become too noisy.

Now it's with this problem in mind that Kirkegaard wrote the following. If I were a physician and someone asked me, what do you think should be done?

I would answer, the first thing, the unconditional condition for anything to be done. In consequence, the very first thing that must be done is create silence.

Bring about silence. God's word cannot be heard. And if, in order to be heard in the hullabaloo, it must be shouted definitely with noisy instruments, well then it is not God's word.

Create silence. Ah, everything is so noisy. And just a strong drink is said to stir the blood, so everything in our day, even the most insignificant project, even the most empty communication, is designed merely to jolt the senses, or stir up the masses, the crowd, the public.

[48 : 37] Noise. And man, this clever fellow, seems to have become sleepless in order to invent ever new instruments to increase noise, to spread noise, to spread noise, to spread insignificance with the greatest possible haste and on the greatest possible scale.

Yes, everything is soon turned upside down. Communication is indeed soon brought to its lowest point with regard to meaning, and simultaneously to the means of communication, are indeed brought to their highest, with regard to speed and overall circulation.

But what is published with such hot haste, and on the other hand, what has greater circulation than rubbish, to create silence.

And so the first thing we have to do is to somehow place ourselves in the position of being able to hear God's voice, being able to listen.

This is where the recovery of dialogue must begin. For all of us, we learn to listen to the voice of God in the scriptures, in the church, in creation, in our own hearts, that we will begin to regain confidence in the power of words and speech, to establish a world within which it will be possible for us and for others to live.

[50 : 09] And when we do venture to speak furthermore, we must strive to do so soberly, faithfully, and covenantally. For if we are careful to utter responsible and truthful words, we will inevitably utter empty and harmful words, thereby contributing to the lo-da-ha, or a no-thingness, nothingness, that cannot sustain life, and that will ultimately be condemned by the word upon his return.

Speaking is a great joy, but it is also a serious business. It is to take a stand in the world, to actualize ourselves as human persons before God and before each other.

And while empty speech tears down in foolish words and snare the soul and endanger others, good words echo, as we have seen, the original dha-ha, by bringing forth and sustaining a world within which it is possible for persons to live and flourish.

Okay. That's it. How much time did we do there? No. Now, Bill asked me also, before I answer questions, to make an announcement about Regent College's lecture series coming up this next week.

We were given money five or ten years ago to fund a lecture series, to bring in a lecturer each year.

[51 : 59] And over the years we have had some remarkable people. Neil Postman came once, one year, I think first year, Charles Taylor, Peter Berger, Merit Sloth-Volfe, a number of really interesting people have come.

And this year, the guest lecturer, Nicholas Walters-Smith, who is a Christian philosopher, probably one of the most well-known and most interesting Christian philosophers around today. And he is going to be speaking on the topic of love and justice. And I'll read this from the back. How ought Christians to think and talk about justice? Where does the weariness concerning talk of justice come from? Should Christians really talk about love rather than justice? Or does the New Testament present us with a more integrated understanding of the relationship between love and justice? Okay? So that's what we'll be talking about. And the lectures are this week, this coming week, Wednesday evening, it's the first one, at 7.30pm, and it will be at Regent College in the chapel.

[53 : 17] And then lectures number two and three are on the phone on the next Thursday, the next day. Number two is at 11.30am. And then the third lecture is again at 7.30pm.

And I think they're all in the college chapel. Now, the problem there is parking. So if you want to do this, make sure you're trying to get there early, because parking will be limited.

Okay. Thank you. Yeah. I'm intrigued. If I understood you correctly, you were saying that hearing and speech is more important in understanding and knowledge than is seeing.

Would that be a correct understanding? Yeah. You know, you'd have to flesh that out, but yes. If we took it from that, would you say that then the scientific methodology based on Aristotle's syllogism was less given to the real knowledge than would be the dialectic?

I think ultimately yes. I mean, in other words, the scientific emphasis on visualizing things for the sake of understanding them is effective.

[54 : 52] But in terms of helping us to understand who we are and where we are and what is going on, it's not very effective at all.

In fact, it's very misleading. I don't know why. I was thinking that this problem that we are involved in at St. John's with the diocese and the larger division within the Anglo-Circumene is, in a sense illustrates this tension between hearing on the one hand and seeing on the other.

I think that if you look out at the culture, we're simply making our evaluations empirically, it's hard to argue against, I don't know how you put it, but the toleration and inclusion of homosexuals and so forth within our church.

It's a particular part of society out there. It's normal, increasingly normal. We have increasingly sophisticated explanations for this.

What could possibly be the reason that we might have for not embracing this and not celebrating within the church?

[56 : 34] From an empirical standpoint, that's sort of hard to argue against. That's the way the world is. That's what we can see.

Well, the position that we take, or the resistance that we offer to this, is based not on what we can see, but on the base of what we've heard.

And the thought is that it is only in hearing this word, which doesn't apparently describe the world that we live in often.

In other words, there's a tension there. And yet we're committed to this notion that it is only through hearing this word that we are unable to really see who we are and what's going on in the world.

And that's a hard thing to do. It's a hard position to hold in a culture that is so entirely visually oriented, in a scientific way, empirically oriented.

[57 : 45] It seems obtuse and it seems absurd really. And yet that illustrates, I think, this tension.

The book, the Hanta. Well, yeah. Well, just thanks for the words I really enjoyed. I've been reading this time and found myself able to listen.

In spite of the problem of concentration in general and so on, I was still able to follow. Oh, okay. I had a small question about when you introduced the term musical speech.

Yeah. I was able to say that as a equivalent to empty speech or something. And why do you use that term? Well, I'm not happy to grasp that question.

I don't know. It's really, really. The reason I use it is because this film that I was working with was using it. And also because Kierkegaard uses it.

[58 : 50] Now, I am going to press a lot of the stuff we've talked about here in terms of the sort connection of this biblical theology with the modern situation.

A lot of this was really thought out by characterized. But, I think what he had in mind is that it's not to denigrate music, but it is to say that when speech simply becomes music, it in effect simply becomes a kind of entertainment.

Which isn't to say that music is nothing but entertainment, but somehow it has lost its, it's become less than it ought to be.

It's no longer really enabling communion, or it becomes simply something that you listen to just to fill the time.

Yeah, pardon? We did not regard that the romantics, I think you thought this before your talk, that the romantics made speech beautiful as a substitute for meaning. Yeah.

[60 : 08] Maybe they didn't. Well, they're very, interestingly, very confused about music. Right? I mean, that's huge. And there's all of these assertions that music is in fact the highest kind of speech, the infinitive speech.

And I don't think it is. At least, I think that that's a problem. Now, of course, the romantic project is, if you take someone like Schleiermacher as one of the ones who inaugurated this movement, Schleiermacher is, he would say that the relationship with God or with the absolute, as he called it, transcends speech.

Our speech is simply a human faculty, it's simply an earthly faculty, and whatever it is that links us with the spirit of things goes way beyond words and speech.

And that seems like a very pious thing to say. But in fact, I don't think it is. I think that's a subversion of God's creation and God himself.

Anyway, yeah, Kathy? Also on the topic of music, in my experience and in some other classes that I've been taking at Region, it's been discussed how music has such a direct effect upon emotions, circumventing any need for reason, any need for dialogue.

[62 : 00] And so it does, as you say, it contributes to this catalog effect, this effect of keeping us focused on something perhaps inwardly on our own emotions, but also in a way I think that expresses why music is such an integral part of worship, in that it gives us a chance to put our whole beings into this dialogue that we have with the Creator, using ourselves as emotional creatures, as rational creatures, as physical creatures, as whole human beings.

Maybe? Yeah, that's a good point. And it's interesting, it may be a concern that evangelical worship, I wouldn't say this about St.

John's, but in many contexts is becoming more and more music, less and less words. and of course the music moves us, and it feels good and, you know, I love it.

But without the word, you know, can that sustain us? I don't think we can, which is a problem.

Yeah? Yeah. given that the emotional power of a given word may have much more to do with its connotation than its strict definition, does it suggest that in our Bible studies and in our sermons we should be more occupied with definitions?

And does it also suggest that maybe the massive attempt we've seen in the last decades to convert scriptural language into the vernacular may not be the right way to go?

[64 : 02] Well, I have a good question. It's not one that I'm sure I can answer very well. I mean, the thing that I was impressed by in looking into all this was the sense that truth-telling or truthfulness, which is the crucial condition of genuine dialogue, yes, it depends upon more or less accurate definition.

I mean, hopefully accurate definition, right? But, even more than that, it depends on the commitment of the one speaking to stand behind the words that are spoken, that he or she speaks. In other words, the emphasis is on truthfulness more than on truth per se. Because our language is, I mean, our human language is ambiguous, it's equivocal, it's difficult to arrive at very precise definitions of situations.

In fact, it's probably possible. Does that mean that we can't communicate, that we can't establish communion on the basis of speech?

No, it doesn't. Because what really matters more than accuracy, per se, is fidelity and being true to our commitment to try to speak the truth and then to stand behind the words that he speaks.

[65 : 57] Now, that kind of veers off away from the question you asked, but I'm not sure that, I think the concern for precision with respect to definition is, in a sense, reflects a more visualist orientation

with respect to knowing what it means to know.

We have to go into that. Yeah? It seems to me that listening is the most important part of speaking. If you haven't listened, you really can't speak because you may speak to someone, but you don't know where they're coming from, so you're giving information or words or something, but if you listen, then you know how to speak.

And I think that's the thought. If we haven't listened to God, we don't know how to speak for anything. I wonder if you could comment about the trap that we fall into with what I'm going to call church speak, for lack of a better word.

And it may be one of the things that Phil was getting at when he talked about defining what do we mean. We have a very tragic situation, I think, sometimes in our churches, and I know this happens here, where people go through the DC program or something like it, and they're getting closer and closer to what an understanding of God might be about, and then they go into our service, and they cannot relate to the hymns we are singing or the words in the liturgy.

This is a different language, and sometimes we use this as a shorthand with each other when we know that the other person is a Christian, but we are trapped into something that makes it difficult for us to communicate with people who are not.

[68 : 01] I mean, how do we say those things without using those formulaic words? Well, that's a contentious kind of question.

I don't know, I mean, I think some of our church speak, I think seems to me, anyway, to be pretty thin, and in a sense you use some of these expressions to avoid thinking about them, to avoid them.

I don't think that's the case with the language of the liturgy, though. personally, I find the language of the liturgy to be thick, and when I'm drawn into it, I am encouraged to deepen my understanding rather than to thin it out.

Now, I think it's true that people just coming into this thing need to be taught, and I think maybe we need to do more, we used to do every now and then, Jim has done this, I know, we've done instructed liturgies, is that what they call them?

Do you remember? Well, it's a phrase that fits, whether we call them or not. where you take people through and you tell them what the words mean, why we're doing things in this order, how this whole thing works, and so forth.

[69 : 57] And once you've sort of understood that, it's really rich, and it's a whole lot richer than a lot of other ways of doing church, at least that I'm aware of.

So I don't want to contemporize or to I don't know, you can tell where I stand, I'm a traditional listener.

Well, I am too, because I enjoy those words, and I've learned, you know, I'm also comfortable with some of the archaic language that is used that way, but we are actually introducing people to Christ in this church, who are now down at 10th Avenue Alliance, because they cannot relate to our church.

And I think this is really a shame. Now, maybe what you're suggesting is the way to go about it, to actually instruct them in the liturgy?

Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. It depends. It depends on where people are from, where they're coming from. I grew up in California, here on the west coast, where nothing is older than anything that's 100 years old is ancient.

[71 : 08] you have no tradition. And when I was brought in to this great tradition, this Christian tradition, that for me was very, very meaningful.

And it still is. And so I'm drawn to these, the literature of the Anglican liturgy, which, you know, had its roots all the way back in the, well, the great tradition, part of the Reformation.

So I love that. On the other hand, I know people who grew up in the Anglican Church, it was dead, you know, they said these things every Sunday, week by week, it had no meaning for anybody, they hated it, and they come into this, and they just can't get over that.

And so for sure they're going to gravitate toward, you know, a more contemporary evangelical service, the way you don't have any of this. And it doesn't remind them of their childhood at all. So, you know, I mean, that happens. But I still think, I would still argue for, or hope, anyway, or contend, that the prayer book, the liturgies that we use week by week are very, very rich.

[72 : 40] And, you know, if we to be instructed into our order, initiated into why they're done the way they are, that will enrich our faith.

And I don't find that to be true of lots of other contemporary worship. Yeah, Jim. this is a footnote to what you just said. Do you know Sue Careless's two books, *Discovering the Prayer Book*, *A Hands-On Approach*?

I think that's the title, isn't it? They are written in a very lightly way. Anyone who isn't used to prayer book language can understand Sue Careless.

and she explains very simply and very attractively the language that we use in our literature. The idea of having an exalted sort of language for interaction with an exalted person like our creator isn't an idea that ought to create difficulties for people.

Indeed, difficulty is sort of really grinning at us when people say, well, I want to worship God in the language in which I talk to my chums.

[74 : 08] There's more of a problem there, I think. It would have been common language in the 16th century though, wouldn't it? Not quite. No? No, it's an exalted dignity.

Dignified is the word. It's a dignified version of everyday speech, but very emphatically dignified in the way that well, it's still the case.

If you are in conversation with a person who has great dignity and you've got any sense of the situation at all, you dignify your language out of respect for that person, don't you?

I mean, if I was blessed, or you were blessed to have an interview with the Queen, you wouldn't walk up smiling, stretch out your hand and say, hello, Queenie.

How's it going? all I wanted to say was that there are these two books that are very helpful for the purpose of getting over the hunt that she was questioned and is calling attention to.

[75 : 32] I was going to say that confirmation classes that Felix Aldi took Bill Knife through just a few years ago actually defined what the liturgy was all about.

So perhaps people who go through D.C. classes should then be directed in that area of teaching exactly what is meant by the written word in the prayer book it would really help them to integrate better into the sense.

And on James who loves the prayer book she's the head of the prayer book I think society worldwide she says the church should be another world than the world on the street. People should feel strange when they come to church.

I think she's right. We're talking we meet the living God in church this isn't the problem. I mean you could go I think I take that point you could push that too far but okay yeah Of course babes in Christ should be fed soft food and grow right right I want to be a little contentious on that side too if you look at the Psalter that was used in Hebraic tradition it was not this necessarily dignified language it was the language of the heart it was David and the other psalmist crying out to God in a very vernacular so I think as Christians we have to be able to somehow keep both of those things in tension maybe slightly on the more personal side and yeah yeah the language that we use whatever language we use it has to the conversation has to be genuinely dialogical genuinely personal if our words are hindering this relation then that's a problem change the word use a different language on the other hand if they are making this conversation more fruitful and more real then that's great and that may well vary from person to person from situation to situation but the key is to be in living conversation with

God and the problem is our words are often barriers to this anyway so you're standing up Bill that means we're done you quoted from the wall of region as you come in the entrance of your word slide remember what the second line was oh no not I stand into the simple so we all stand of the benefit and don't we roll a little bit slack lit in here but so thanks Craig for the talk wind long night along