

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28) – November 19, 2023

*“Therefore encourage one another
and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

–1 Thessalonians 5:11–

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. This little nursery rhyme has been around since the mid-1800s, and it is likely that most of us have heard it: *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.* For any human being that has lived a minimum of three years of life, he/she knows that these words are anything but true! It’s not too long after a youngster learns to talk in sentences that he/she discovers the power of words. Words can get us something we need. We say, “I’m hungry,” to let someone know we need to eat. We can say, “I’m tired,” to make others aware that we need to rest. And it doesn’t take long before we learn how hurtful words can be to others.

I can vividly remember a moment when I was about four years old, and I was attending preschool. My brother is eleven months younger than me, so he and I attended preschool together. Of course, we were in separate classes because he was in the three-year-old class. However, there were times in the day when all the preschoolers would play together, especially when it was time for outdoor recreation. Now, I cannot remember the exact circumstances of the situation, but I remember overhearing a couple of kids getting frustrated with my brother because he wasn’t doing something they wanted him to do or responding in a way the other kids wanted. I heard one boy shout, “Geez, you’re so dumb!” That boy directed those words towards my brother, and it made me mad! In a matter of seconds, tears filled my brother’s eyes as he had been wounded by another’s tongue. Words can hurt and cut deeply, but words can also build-up and encourage.

Paul urges the new Christians in Thessalonica to help one another grow spiritually by love. We are called to do the very same. May we use our words to build one another up, not tear one another down.

Prayer: Gracious God, we give you thanks that you have given us the gift of community. Help us, Lord, to speak words of love and encouragement to one another, so that we, too, can build one another up as Christian believers. We ask this in the name of your son Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord, amen.