

Service Overview

Speaker: Jo-Anne

Sermon Series: At The Table With One Another

Message: Words That Bring Life

Scripture Reference: Romans 12: 9-21

This transcription was generated by Adobe Premiere. It may contain small errors that don't perfectly match up with words spoken and is provided to assist with accessibility but without warranty. While the document has been edited for spelling and clarity by a member of the congregation, the speaker(s) have not proof-read or corrected this document themselves.

Table of Contents *Click to navigate*

- ▶ [Service Welcome](#)
- ▶ [Worship Singing](#)
- ▶ [Post-Worship Prayer](#)
- ▶ [Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events](#)
- ▶ [Missionary Interview](#)
- ▶ [Bible Reading](#)
- ▶ [Sermon](#)
- ▶ [Post-Sermon Prayer](#)
- ▶ [Worship Singing](#)
- ▶ [Post-Worship Prayer](#)
- ▶ [Conclusion](#)
- ▶ [Online Outro](#)

Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

Welcome to PBC this morning. Lord, we just offer up our hearts. We come before you, we lay our crowns down, we lay everything down before you right now as we enter boldly before your throne, to come before you and to worship you as our Lord and our Savior. We love you, Lord. We give it all to you.

Worship Singing

Song: This Is Amazing Grace by Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, Paul Wickham

Song: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus by Helen H. Lemmel

Song: What A Beautiful Name by Ben Fielding, Brooke Ligertwood

Song: Holy Forever by Brian Johnson, Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Jenn Johnson, Phil Wickham

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Our God and our King, the one who knows us, who made us, who loves us. We lift your name high.

And we gather together as your people here in this place this morning to declare your praises, declare your goodness and your greatness. And to declare the things that you have done for us. Father, we thank you for your love for us so beautifully seen in Jesus Christ. And we lift your name high, Jesus, and we thank you for your presence here.

Show your Holy Spirit in us and among us, just seeking to lift out not just our voices, but our hearts and our minds to this room. So, Lord, may all that we do today bring glory to you in Christ's name. Amen.

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Kathy & Stephen Bates*

Stephen: Morning, everyone. Just want to say welcome to Parramatta Baptist Church. It's wonderful to have you all here. What a beautiful, drizzly, chilly day to come to church, so it's lovely to have you here. We do want to say hello to those who are watching us online as well.

This is the last week of school. So that means a couple of things. Firstly, today will be the last week that we have where our kids and our youth programs for a few weeks. That's the first thing. Also it means that in only nine days, we have our kids holiday program. So we have well over 120 children coming, and there are a whole lot of volunteers coming. We will be closing registrations on Wednesday, so if you're going to this holiday program, you need to hop online, have a look, and we will be closing registrations on Wednesday. So if you haven't registered, please do.

And can I just say, if you are new to the life of Parramatta Baptist Church, welcome. Absolutely wonderful to have you here with us. You are really welcome. But it would be lovely if you could please also let us know who you are. Because we're having a newcomer's afternoon in four weeks' time, and we would love to invite you, and it's really hard to invite you if we don't know who you are.

So, there are some cards up the back, or you can scan a QR code up there as well, or just come and talk to anyone that you saw up front. They would be a good person to talk with.

--- Break as the congregation chats while the children go off to kids church programs ---

This is meant to be family, right? We understand that we're not *literally* family, but this is a place which becomes like a second family. A place where we decide to find a place of belonging and connecting with each other in a very real and deep way.

I mentioned our newcomers' event on the 27th of July. That'll be the next one. We do them about every four to 6 to 8 weeks. So the next one is at the end of July, and it is an opportunity for you to meet others who are new to the life of the church, and to meet some of the, longer term people and some of the pastoral team of the church.

It's time to hear about a little bit about who we are, the values, the vision that we have here. It's also an opportunity to ask any questions you have. Maybe you haven't been part of the Baptist church before, and you want to know what kind of weird people we are. We're happy to tell you and show you just how weird we are. That's fine. But you are very welcome. Just let us know who you are. An email address would be fine. Scan the QR code, send it through and we'll hook you into to some of the communications and invitations to what's going on.

Also, just a big thank you to everybody who has joined a serving team over the last few weeks. We've put all the teams together. That's actually been really encouraging. Normally, we get up here on this day and we go, 'okay, we've put the rosters out there and there's so many holes, and we need you to, like, fill your name in', but not this time. So thank you everybody for that. It's great.

Well, actually, there may be a few gaps still, particularly on the tech team up the back. Please talk to them. They would love some assistance. If you are new to the service teams. just remember, we do need to get some code of conduct off you. And so if you're not aware of that, then come and see me. I'll be in the foyer afterwards, so just come and grab me. Or if you'll bring one back, you can give that to me. Or put it in the that little box up the back there as well.

Also, this morning is the last of our series, part two of 'the table.' If you're wondering why we have plates in our church up on the wall, this is why. Because this year we're working through a series on the table. This term, we've been looking at the table with one another. And, this morning, Jo-Anne is going to wrap up the second part of the series for us, looking at the words that we use at the table, and I'm not going to say any more than that, other than to say, for those of you who don't know, Jo-Anne and Frank* have been such an incredible blessing to the life of this church. They bring such warmth.

When Kathy put this series together, she said, 'Jo-Anne is the one for the last one.' And it came out of reading a book that Jo-Anne has written called 'Swan Song.' I'm not going to say any more, but, but we just want to affirm just the role that you play in the life of that church.

You are an encourager, not only in the words you say that you have on your heart, but also you listen to God and you speak into the lives of others the words that you feel he has for them as well. And so, if I asked people to put up their hand if they've ever been encouraged by Jo-Anne, probably half the church will and the other half have only arrived in the last few months.

But we're really looking forward to what Jo-Anne is going to contribute. She's also very shy, so at the moment I'm embarrassing her, so I'm going to stop her right there and hand over to my wife, Kathy. Thank you.

Kathy: Good morning everyone. For those who don't know me, I'm Kathy, and I'm also one of the pastors here, as well as being Steve's wife. I just want to say that meaningful connections are really lifegiving, aren't they? Have you had the experience of a meaningful connection with another person, or perhaps even a meaningful connection with God?

I think meaningful connections often stand out as the highlight of our week. When you look back and you go, 'you know, what's been the highlight of the last week or the last month?', it's often that meaningful connection that you had either with God or with another person. So on Saturday the 10th of August, we are having a meaningful connection retreat, and we're creating space and facilitating opportunity for meaningful connection, both with God and also with one another.

Now, I'm so sorry, guys, but this is for the women and girls in this place, where we're hoping to have anyone from Year 7 and up to come along and be part of this meaningful connection space that we are creating. Our prayer, our hope, is that this really renews our souls, that it will be a place where you can just breathe, and that it also becomes one of those markers in your walk with the Lord where you just go, 'that that was really significant.'

So we'd love to have you come. It's really simple in terms of registering. There's a regular table in the foyer, and you can register if you didn't receive an invitation on the way in. Ladies, please grab one. We tried to grab as many people as we could, but some of you snuck in. I know there's a little QR code on the back that you can register through there as well. You can also register through the website or through the newsletter. So really, really simple. We'd love to have whoever would like to join in that space with us, to be present with us.

Missionary Interview *Speaker: Kathy Bates, Rebecca**

Now I want to invite Rebecca* to come up. When I introduce you to Rebecca. Rebecca is regularly part of our 10:45 service, and she has been at PBC for just a few years now. Rebecca is also our newest missionary partner of PBC.

Rebecca, you are far from being new in mission work, so we've adopted you as one of our mission families of the church. But in terms of your mission work, how long ago did you respond to God's call? Where did it take you? And what did you see God do?

Rebecca: So it was back in the 90s when I was given by God this really strong passion to see God worshipped in places where he was not yet known. And it was such a deep desire, such a strong feeling, that I know it was from God's spirit. There were times where I would plead with tears that God would send me to some corner of the world where people would otherwise have no chance to meet a Christian to hear about Jesus, or to know what it looks like for someone to know him.

And he did. He sent me to Turkey, and I went there in 1999, and then it was a 99% Muslim country. And I spent time first of all in Istanbul for a couple of years. And then I moved to Tarsus in Cappadocia. And I moved there because in those places there was, at that point, no Christians and no church, and that was the kind of place that God was leading me to.

So God gave us, me and my teammates, so much grace and strength in our weakness as he just planted us amongst the people there. We're learning a totally new culture, and the place was hostile to the gospel. But over time, as we got to know people. God built relationships and broke up hard ground and one by one, he called people out of the darkness to him.

Usually, a dream was part of that process, but then it needed a Christian there so that they could see what that looked like and that we could read the Bible together. And I saw the power of God's word to transform lives, to open eyes and transform. We saw lots of miracles, but also we saw times where there were no miracles, when that's what we felt like we needed the most.

And there was strong opposition. There was persecution, even people who were martyred. And that would turn some people away, but it would make others stronger. And that's what the church was made of, those ones that got stronger. I saw God's, faithful, long-suffering love as he kept patiently wooing people and helping them when they started to fall under the pressure.

So gradually, in both Tarsus and Cappadocia, I saw God form a small church in each of those places that is still faithfully witnessing. And on the slide are some of the people at those churches, but it was made up of people like this. On the left there's Yeshua. I've known him since he was a kid, and he used to get beaten up for his faith. And also, when he was in compulsory military service, he

would be thrust out into the front, so he would be killed first. Obviously he wasn't. And he actually got to see with his own eyes the angels that were protecting him.

He and his wife, Daisy, are now leading the church in Tarsus, and Haley there next to them. She is a cleaning lady who I've done lots of Bible studies with her over the years, and she's a fiery evangelist, and she does the same with others. And this is Songu and her family, I met them in Tarsus. The family were not Christians, but they came to know God.

And Songu was terrified what that was going to mean for her, so she cried out to God, 'it's just so dark, show me some light', and he gave her dreams of light flooding her being and her home. She's suffered a lot for Jesus as well, they couldn't find work because of being a Christian, she was rejected from her family, disowned.

But over the years she's kept growing. She's a woman with a heart after God, and she is now, just two weeks ago, being inducted to be one of the two pastors of the church in the capital city of Turkey. And there's two on the left, they're such a humble couple from a little village outside of Tarsus, and they're now leading the church in Tarsus.

So basically, what I got to see was God's slow, steady, deep and unmistakable work over the years. When I first went, there were about 300 Christians in the whole of the nation. And by 2021 there were 10,000, which is still a tiny proportion of the nation. But it was such a privilege to be a small part of his story of Turkey, and to see the birth of the fledgling church in modern day Turkey. Isn't that fantastic?

Kathy: Rebecca, every time I talk to you and I hear those stories, I feel like I'm talking to the Apostle Paul. Right? You just feel like, 'I know those names from Bible times,' you know, it's just beautiful. So you spent 22 years in Turkey? But you did feel that God was calling you back to Australia during Covid, and you've kept working with WEC in Sydney. So tell us about the kind of mission work that you are doing in Sydney now, because it's just as beautiful and effective as well.

Rebecca: Thank you. So even when I was in Turkey, God began to give me a heart for refugees. We had millions of them coming over the border, and they filtered through to my area, and they had no food. They had no warmth in the winter. So we started to serve them. And we saw some of them become Christians. You can ask me later for these people's stories. They're just beautiful.

So when I came to Sydney and, I realized that I could continue to work with people from Muslim cultures, other cultures, and work with refugees. I've joined the Sydney refugee team, and I love to respond to God's call to welcome those, instead of now going, to welcoming those from other nations who are coming here, those who've suffered from war and persecution. There's so much trauma, and they're still experiencing so much grief. We have people coming from so many

different countries, and they're from countries that, in their normal life there, they wouldn't have a chance to hear about Jesus. Or if they did, it would cost them a lot to even begin to seek him.

So, I have this opportunity to reach out to people from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar and South Sudan recently because, like so many different nationalities, we do this in some practical ways. Just one of those practical ways is through the food parcel team, and we give food to 60 families each week just to help them to get started here in the country.

But actually, the core of what we do is about relationships and bringing Jesus into their situations and his hope into their lives. So we have a program where we have 'companions'. So I'm a companion to quite a few different refugee families, but we also encourage people from churches to become a companion. So it's being a friend, and it's doing all these kinds of things, but lots of practical stuff too. But really it's about friendship and sharing Jesus. So we have opportunities to pray, to talk about sharing life and sharing Jesus. So if we're sharing life with our friends, we're sharing Jesus. We can read the Bible with them when they're open to that.

And I just love my refugee friends. And they say things like, 'we don't have any family here. We've lost our family. But you're our family and we do things like weekends away.' Last year we had over 100 Iranians and Afghans coming to this weekend. And I've had the pastor that we invited to be the speaker. He's an Iranian who is amazed at how the people joined in and came to listen about Jesus. He said, 'they must really trust you.' And that's what happens. Like with these relationships, there is a trust that's formed that gives such an opportunity to share that Jesus.

And also I'm involved in Freedom to Flourish, which is basically for the healing of trauma and for people to find belonging and to find Jesus. So we have a garden ministry, and I'm part of the therapeutic craft activities. That's on Fridays.

And one of the things that I do which is not connected to that, and that is that God's called me in this part of my life to walk alongside and to journey with other missionaries and budding missionaries both here and overseas, doing mentoring, pastoral care and spiritual direction.

Kathy: Wow. That's so, so good, Rebecca. It's just our joy to partner with you. What is it that brings you most joy? Because you hear a lot of stories as you're alongside people. But what is it that really brings you profound joy?

Rebecca: There's so many places that God puts me in. So I love how by his spirit, he puts me in these places and then he just does stuff. But it can look like just sitting with two Syrian friends and reading the Bible with them and then doing crafts or something in a journal. So that they're really engaging in what they're hearing. Or it can look like sitting on the floor drinking tea with an Afghani lady, and she's sharing her deep struggles. And I get to pray for her.

I just love every step that brings people closer to Jesus, every little thing. And I love being on calls with people in Senegal and Spain and Japan and encouraging and seeing God help people grow and things like that.

Kathy: That's lovely. It's such a privilege to partner with you as a church, to have you as one of our mission partners. Now, as individual brothers and sisters in your church family, what are some of the ways that we can partner with you in the work that you're doing?

Rebecca: So one thing that we really need always is prayer, because we're not just doing practical things. We want to see people come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, and that needs prayer. So, later, you could sign up to receive my prayer letter and take a little card and stick it on the fridge, to remind you to pray. I've been living on people's fridges for years, so I'm used to it.

You can do a 1 day training. We have them 2 or 3 times a year, and you could become a companion to a refugee or refugee family. Also if you wanted to or your small group wanted to be involved in some way, you could invite me to share more at your group. You could commit to pray to the even more specific things. And also, even we need rice and oil, basmati rice and extra virgin olive oil. So you could do a rice and oil drive in your small group, that kind of practical thing.

And then there's always how missionaries are trusting God to live. So there's also that thought, if you felt God prompting you to be part of this in some way, then you could use this QR code or it's also on my prayer card down in the corner. It's very tiny on my shirt, in fact.

Kathy: That's wonderful. Can we pray for you, Rebecca? Would you like to stand as mark of solidarity with Rebecca in all that God has called her into?

Lord God, I want to thank you so much for Rebecca. I want to thank you for her faithfulness to the call that you have put on her life. Lord God, I just want to thank you that she leaves a legacy of beautiful lives that have been transformed by you, Lord Jesus. And I want to thank you that that points glory to you, Lord God.

Lord, we pray for Rebecca in the work that she is doing here. And Lord God, we pray that you would go before her. We just ask Lord for those that she is ministering among her and her team and those who volunteer with her team as well. Lord, we pray for the lives that they're walking alongside with Jesus, would you make yourself known? Holy Spirit, we ask for those dreams and visions and miracles, signs and wonders, Lord God, that that open eyes and cause hearts to inquire.

And Lord God, we just want to pray for the faithful to follow through of being able to read the Bible and to disciple those who have tasted something of your goodness but don't understand yet all that

they've experienced. And so, Lord God, we just want to pray that here in Sydney among refugees, Lord, that there would be a solid church that is established.

Lord, that your people rise up to really form a solid group of disciples, Lord God, who love you, who are able to share you back into the networks and families that they have. Lord, we commit it to you and we want to pray for your blessing over Rebecca. We want to pray, Lord God, for your provision for her.

And Lord, she's just made slight mention of just this monetary need as well. You know, missionaries do need money to live. Lord God, I want to pray your provision into that space, Lord, that her financial needs would be covered going forward as well. Lord, for all that you know is needed, would you just go continue to go before Rebecca? And would you strengthen and encourage her in her inner being as well? In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you everyone. We can have our Bible reading.

Bible Reading: Romans 12: 9-21 (NIV UK)

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.[a] Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,'[b] says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'[c]

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Sermon: At The Table – Words That Bring Life Restoration *Speaker: Jo-Anne*

I have to say, it's such a privilege to be up here this morning, sharing with you. And thank you for that lovely introduction before. Steve, I have to say too, I'm so delighted to have been on the same platform as Rebecca today, because I actually knew her before she ever went to Turkey. We've had many conversations all through her years in Turkey, and I visited her there five times, so I totally support all that she has done and it's just wonderful to hear her up here, speaking this morning.

I'm going to hop straight into my task today, which is to focus on how we actually put into words, how we actually express the values or the postures that we've heard about these last few weeks, in the way we treat one another.

We heard about belonging, servanthood, seeing the other, welcoming inclusion and authenticity. But today my focus is on how we actually speak or write or text them to one another. Now, you will see on the next slide a picture of something that we saw up in Katoomba earlier this year in one of the little laneways that lead up from the main street through the shops there.

There's a little shop and it's actually called the Little Lost Bookshop. Maybe some of you've found it like us. And as you go in the door on the lefthand side, there is a massive red chair. And that caught my eye enough. It just looks so comfy. But it was the words on the cushion on the chair that caught my mind and my eyes even more.

And this is what the words on that cushion say. 'No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.' That's worth thinking about, isn't it? Whether you agree with that or not, when you've thought about it, whether you think that's possible. I'm sure we have all had the experience of how words can affect change our own personal worlds haven't we, whether in a positive or negative way.

And that should make us realise, too, how much our own words can similarly impact others at times. And I know personally for sure it is hard to tame our tongues, isn't it? As James talks about in chapter 3 of his letter, elsewhere in Scripture, we are urged to do exactly that, to tame our tongues, to choose to say instead or write things that will build others up.

In Ephesians 4:9, Paul writes this—*do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* I want to say, first off, that for believers around the table, we have all the resources we need, haven't we, to do this. Because we of all people know how God has reached out to us in love through Jesus, and we have experienced that amazing, life changing, completely fulfilling love for ourselves. Also, that each day God's spirit is present in us to continue to fill us with that love, to change our hearts and to empower our words as we listen to His spirit.

You know, on one occasion, Jesus said something at the end of just a little session of teaching. He said something about the words we say that have always challenged me. In Luke 6: 45 he says, *'the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.'* That's a sobering thought, isn't it? If the old version is what comes into mind—*'out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks'*. But it's a sobering thought to me. Yes, even when we know God's amazing love, we can still speak to others in a reckless, hurtful way. Yet I believe with all my heart that the more we stay close to God, and the more we allow God's Spirit to continue to fill our hearts each day, the more readily those life giving words we need to speak to others will flow from our mouths. And that's encouraging to me.

So let's focus now on three uplifting and life giving ways. This passage was read to us touches on today three life giving ways. God's love can flow out to our brothers and sisters in Christ through our words. And the first is this—we are called to speak life giving words of sincere, loving empathy and compassion to one another. Kathy mentioned this last week verse 9-10 at the beginning of the Bible Reading passage. *'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to another in love.'* And then verse 15, pure empathy here, *'rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn.'*

Now Reuben explained a few days ago that empathy involves loving others enough to enter in as best we can into what they are experiencing, to walk in their shoes, so to speak, to truly feel their joy or their pain and any empathy. We often need to be loving and sincere in that we are not merely to pretend that we care, because that just doesn't cut it. People can see folks a mile away. Many years ago, our eldest daughter was 18 or 19 at the time, she was quite sick and she had to have a major operation and something didn't go quite right. And so she was out of circulation for quite a long time. And finally, one Sunday night, she made it back to church.

And you can imagine that she walked in by herself. She felt very vulnerable and fragile and that thankfully, this young girl about her age came bounding up to her and said, 'hi, how are you? I know you've been sick, but how are you doing now?' And our daughter breathed a sigh of relief, and she opened her mouth and actually started to answer this girl. But then she stopped dead because she realised she was talking to thin air. In the meantime, this girl had turned away and walked over to her own group of friends nearby and left our daughter just standing there too.

Now, I talked with our daughter about this just over a year or so ago, and that's about 30 years ago now. And she shuddered even as she remembered that. Can you see what an impact that had on her? How easily something like that can happen, unless we are truly there for the other person and are sincerely sharing and empathizing with them? How much better if she'd have heard something like, 'oh, it's so good to see you back. Come over here and join us and tell us how you're going.'

It would have been easy, wouldn't it? In hindsight. But, you know, I think when we do truly empathise with others, we often don't need to say too much, do we? And I want to say that this is where those of you who are quieter and perhaps less chatty and outgoing, may have a huge advantage over those of us like me, who probably talk too much at times when we're with others.

And so please listen. Those of you who are quieter here, I wonder if you've ever shared something that you've found difficult or challenging in your life with someone. And have you ever had the response where someone would jump in, I think, trying to empathise, but they're just overdoing it and saying something like, 'oh, I know exactly what you mean. That happened to me too.' And off they go on their own story. Someone might come back to you and say, 'tell me about it. Tell me about it.' I cannot get my head around that, because really, when you say that to someone, you're saying, well, that was nothing, your experience. What about my experience?'

And after going on their own story, the focus is totally off you. You wouldn't do that though, would you? But you know, instead, all that really needed is just a few gentle comments, perhaps feeding back what you hear from the person, or asking a question to clarify what the person has shared so that they know they've been truly heard. Even just something like, 'oh gosh, it sounds like you've got a lot on your plate this week with your medical appointments and people staying', or whatever's happening for them. That's a lot. That's just feeding back to them what you've heard. And that's just so encouraging, isn't it?

You know, many, many years ago, again, I was in a very draining high school teaching situation, and I knew I had to keep going. I didn't know how I could, but because my wage was paying part of our mortgage here in Sydney at that time, I thought, 'how can I keep doing this?' And one Sunday, on Monday, I was offloading at length to our minister and his wife about this and just trying to talk about ways I could survive in this situation. And at the end of that time, a lovely minister just looked at me and he said six words. He said, 'so you feel trapped, do you?' Do you know, even as I tell you that, I can feel the relief inside me, because that, to me, I thought, 'oh, he's heard me. He's understood. That's how I feel.'

I hadn't been able to put a name to it, but just simply putting a name to it validated it for me that I wasn't overreacting, that I wasn't just whingeing for no reason. He validated what I was feeling. 'So you feel trapped, do you?' All he was doing was feeding back what he had heard, but it didn't solve the problem at that point. He was part of solving it later down the track. But what a gift that was to me. Just those a gentle few words back, showing that he'd heard me.

And, you know, often we can say even less when empathising with someone else, because even simply listening well, being truly present with someone, can express empathy in itself. And it can also help us remember what is said, even names. And I'm the world's worst at it. But by remembering what is said, we can check back next time. How heartwarming is that? If you see someone at church when you talk to them the previous week and you say, 'so? How did you go? How did you go with those medical appointments, with all those visitors and so on?' We can all do that, can't we? However quiet or talkative we are as well in this difficult situations.

Our passage also urged us to sincerely share others' joy as well. This is what being a family means, isn't it? To share in the joyful times as well. 20 years ago, I was starting my writing journey in my mid-50s, doing crazy things in my life, and, I wrote for almost one whole year, apart from visiting Rebecca in Turkey that same year.

And, one day I found myself in the back of a car with someone I didn't know, being ferried to a conference somewhere, and this person asked me what I did, and so I told her I had just finished writing the first draft of what became my first two novels. And it was an absolutely fulfilling,

amazing, cathartic experience for me. All those words that have been there inside me, all those years came out on the screen.

And while it was hugely difficult and hugely time consuming, it was a wonderful experience and I used to try and explain it to people and sometimes I would just get these blank looks and like, 'oh, that's nice.' And then the subject would be changed. They just couldn't compute it. But this lady, who I did not know, she listened, and she said to me, she asked me two simple questions. 'What was the best thing about this whole experience and what was the hardest thing about it?' How easy is that? But you know, it was. I can feel the relief again inside me because she really wanted to hear the best thing about it, and she rejoiced when I told her how fulfilling it had been for me. And she commiserated when I talked about all the hard work involved as well. Just simple little questions, but it just opened up and just blessed me so much.

So I wonder, even before we leave here today, is there's someone who is with us whom you can express and see empathy to in one way or another. And I want to challenge us all this week, to look for those who need to hear such words from us wherever we are in our lives, at home, at school, at work, with family, whatever. Because you never know. If we empathize with someone like that, they may well be the next one at the table with us. Don't you think people need to be heard? They need to be listened to.

And then this passage also urges us to speak life giving words of encouragement and affirmation to one another. Paul writes in another letter in 1 Thessalonians 5:11. He says, *'therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.'* When I read this, I thought to myself, 'this little text could be written to us at Parramatta Baptist, couldn't it?' It could read 1 Parramatta Parramatta Baptist 5:11, couldn't it? Because I've had such lovely words of encouragement for so many of you. But we can all do better, can't we? Me included. Encouraging words can enable us to keep going and achieve the things God has for us to do.

And affirming words go even further. When we speak in the affirmative, we're saying yes, aren't we, we give a 'yes' answer. So when we affirm someone else, we are really saying a 'big yes' to them, a 'big yes' to them for who they are. We are saying we value them. We truly value them for who they are apart from what they can achieve or do for us. They are worthwhile and they are so valued.

You know, just a few months ago, I had to record a radio interview with a lovely young man in the UK. I get to do funny things as a writer, sitting in my study recording a radio interview via Zoom with someone in the UK. In the process of talking about words that give life, life giving words, which is the theme of my last book, this lovely young man told me a story. He said when he was growing up, if he ever made a mistake with something, a close family member would say to him, 'you're so useless.'

I shuddered, sitting in my study at home. But then he went on very quickly to say, 'it was just probably a throwaway line. They probably didn't mean anything.' But then he went on to say, 'it took me many, many years to undo the harm those words did to me.' My, I just wanted to leap through that screen on my computer and go and give this man a hug somewhere in the UK.

What a challenge that story is to each one of us, because those words can just flow so easily from our mouths. Instead of building up, we tear down. This passage also urges us to put our pride and self-interest aside and to truly focus on encouraging others instead. Verse 10 of Romans 12 says, '*honour one another above yourselves.*'

Like I said at the beginning, as children of God, we are so blessed and so able to do this because we ourselves know we are completely loved, completely accepted, and completely secure in God. Isn't that true? As a result, surely we can say a sincere 'well done' to someone else, even if they are better at something than us, or a sincere, 'that's great, keep going,' when they're doing something we would love to be able to do ourselves.

We don't need to feel threatened or jealous as we rest in God's amazing love, but truly honour and spur others on instead. And that's such a freeing way to live, isn't it? Really? I see this all the time in writing circles when somebody's book does better than someone else. Well, who cares? Basically, because we know we are loved in God, and we are also truly blessed in a different way as believers.

Because from time to time, God may give us encouraging words, what I call words of insight. But the Scripture calls them prophetic words or words of knowledge, if you like. They come direct from His spirit into our spirit to share with others. I wonder if you've experienced that. I know there's some groups exploring this here at the moment/ Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14: 3 that one of the main aims of such words is, in fact, to build up and to benefit others. He says, '*the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.*'

Now, many years ago now, I was in my 40s. I did another crazy thing and went to theological college in my middle to late 40s. And just before that year started, at the end of that previous year, a visiting speaker came to our church, and at the end of his sermon, he had some little prophetic words for people, mostly in the form of just Bible references.

At once, he totally said, 'is anyone considering going to theological college? Please stand up.' I was right down the front in the worship team that that morning, and I can tell you I felt the biggest idiot standing up because I hadn't told many people and I thought, 'what will they think of me? I totally lost the plot at this age and stage of my life, so ending up going to college.'

But I stood and he just looked straight at me and all he said was 1 Corinthians 16:13. I had no Bible and no pen and paper with me that morning, but a friend looked it up and handed me this ragged

piece of paper that she'd torn out of a notebook that morning. And this is what the verse said, *'be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.'*

Even as I say that this morning. I wonder if those words are for someone here this morning, so I'm going to repeat them. *'Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.'*

I can't tell you how many times during my years at theological college and on into ministry, how many times I turned to the back of my Bible, picked up that piece of paper and read those words. It kept me going so many times that the paper fell apart, and I don't have it here to show you. But that was the power of that one little reference that that man gave me, and the power of God's word.

I just would love to share, just briefly, two little words that I'm just hoping really minister to someone here this morning. I think I'd be disobedient if I didn't. They've just been coming to me as I've been preparing this message. And the first is that I have a sense that there's someone here this morning or listening online who has been the recipient of very negative, critical, judgmental words today, even before you came into this service, and you just haven't been able to get them out of your mind.

It may not be someone from your own household, maybe it was someone who said this to you in the past. Some words like, *'oh, you're such a hypocrite. Here you are heading off to church again,'* something like that. And it's just been replaying and replaying in your mind. And I really want you to hear what I believe God is saying to you. He says, you're not like that at all. That is not who you are.' And he's saying this so lovingly to you. 'Listen to me instead. Because I speak the truth, and I am saying the very opposite to you right now. I'm so delighted you're here.' If that applies to you here, I just pray peace on you now in Jesus' name, because I believe those are God's Word to you. I know that these words from God have to be tested and prayed about, but they can truly have an impact. And I just pray that that truly impacts your heart today.

And the second one is that I just have a gentle sense that there's someone feeling such a huge failure as you sit here today because you don't like talking to or initiating conversations with anyone at all. But Jesus wants you to know that even the most tentative, quiet, caring words you have managed to say have been like a precious jewel to him, and he is enriching others' lives with them all, even now. And he also wants you to know that each time you've said something little to bless others, and He's just been standing right there, applauding, so don't pull back next time, will you? Because Jesus is right there beside you, applauding and cheering you on.

And then we're also called very firmly in this passage that was read to us to speak life giving words of forgiveness, of peace, of healing, and of blessing to one another. Verse 14, *'bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.'* Verse 16, *'live in harmony with one another'.* Verse 17, *'do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'* Big words, aren't they?

You know, sometimes things happen in God's family, centred around the table together. Sometimes we do become annoyed with someone or hurt or offended, rightly or wrongly. It does happen. But we're all learning and growing. Just as Kathy pointed out in her sermon last week, on that continuum she had, with a coming to know Jesus here, and then we grow and we grow, don't we? And become more and more like him as time goes on. So we're all at the different ages and stages in our journey, and we need to remember that. And also we need to remember that the enemy loves to sow discord among us, and jump at the slightest little crack. And so at times, as believers together, may we may need to ask for or express forgiveness, however hard that might be.

And, you know, we really have no option as believers, do we? Because as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:32, he says, *'be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'* Well, we don't have any excuses, do we? You know, I think the most pristine, clear, beautiful example of hearing words of forgiveness expressed was one afternoon when my husband and I were minding our two youngest grandchildren at their home.

My granddaughter very proudly pulled out from her bag a little square piece of cardboard, which was her first ever merit award from school. And the parents know how precious they are. A little merit award for something she'd done well at school. And I say to her in true Nanna style, 'oh that's wonderful, let's stand it on the bench so mummy and daddy can see it as soon as they come home.'

And I turned around to do something else, and when I looked back at it, it disappeared. And I saw my grandson on the floor nearby with a pen in his hand, and he crossed out her name on the certificate and had written his name in capital letters instead. My heart went out to him because he has ADHD and at that time it was untreated, undiagnosed and he had other behavioural issues. The last thing he would have been getting was a merit award from school.

Can you see how much he wanted one though? Oh my goodness. The other part of me was absolutely furious on behalf of my granddaughter. And so I thought, 'what do I do?' And just sitting there was our granddaughter, who saw what had happened. And I thought, 'this is not going to end well.' But, you know, she was just silent for a minute, and then she just looked straight at him. I couldn't believe what I heard. She just looked at him and she just said, this is exactly how she said it, 'it's okay. It's okay. I forgive you. I forgive you.'

Where did it come from? I mean, she just went happily on with her afternoon as if nothing had happened. I saw the look of relief on her grandson's face. I thought he was going to hug her. He didn't. And he didn't apologise either. But how freeing that was. How freeing that was for her. Not sure about him, but you know that she had said it. It was over. It was done with.

What a challenge that little tableau is in my mind, whenever I choose not to forgive someone else and to speak out those words. Gosh, that was a huge lesson. But of course, sometimes we don't have that opportunity to speak out our forgiveness as directly as that, but it's still important, I

believe. I just wanted to encourage you to speak out those words of forgiveness, even if you're by yourself or to write them down, because that can be life giving to us personally, as any anger and the desire for revenge lifts from us, doesn't it? We get rid of it.

And that's what that passage just finishes off talking about. It says leave it to God to sort out. God will avenge. God will bring justice. Just allow God to lift that off you. And so even speaking it out to nobody is important, isn't it? Be speaking it out to God, and of course alongside speaking out words of peace and forgiveness.

We may sometimes need, of course, to love others enough to stand firm, to challenge them about their behaviour and to hold them accountable for their words and actions, especially if this affects and hurts others. I think we can all understand that, but it needs to be done lovingly, with great sensitivity to God's spirit and to the person involved too.

Many years ago now, it was just a year after we were married, my husband took a year out of ministry to finish a uni degree, and he decided that he might apply for tutoring job at the uni at the end of that year. And he told a lovely Christian lady in his staff room at the time, and she came back to him a little bit later and she just challenged him in such a beautiful Christian, gentle way. She just said to him, 'don't forget your calling.' And he knew that was true. He took her on board and he went and he withdrew that job application.

And we've been in ministry like 55 years or something. You know, it changed the course of his life. But I also want to say, in finishing off this section, let's not just forget, apart from all this is the scenario of forgiveness and so on, let's not forget the joy and privilege in general of simply speaking words of peace and blessing to others among us as we talk and do life together at any time.

And now there's a young mum in our church and I can't see if she's here today. But a few years ago I was at the women's event here and we were in a small group just down there somewhere, and she was talking about how there were so many pressures on her in her life, with young children and family and job and whatever. And I knew that God just wanted me to say to her at the end of that time, 'peace on your home.' Sounds corny, doesn't it? I just laughed and so put my hand up and I said, 'peace on your home.'

And this is probably about four years ago now. Every time I see her, if I catch her, I hear I say, 'peace on your home'. If I don't, if she doesn't even see me, I'll see her, and I say, 'oh God, there she is. There's that young mum. Lord, bring peace to her home. Speak blessing into her home.' How easy is that? You know we can all do that, can't we?

So I wonder today, as we leave here, is there someone we can speak blessing and peace to, just in a lovely, gentle way, as we talk together. And each day this week again, let's look for someone we can

bless in a special way with words. Or at least pray God's blessing and grace over them and peace over them in their lives, even if they don't know that's what we're doing.

So in concluding, I really just want to come back to the beginning and say to us all again that the key to speaking words that give life to others truly is knowing God's love for ourselves, isn't it? You know, that's the key, isn't it? To allow that love, to know that love, and to allow that love to flow out through our words.

I really want to say to you, if you haven't experienced that love of God yourself, why not seize this moment? Talk to someone else who you came with, or talk to us and we would love to pray for you too, because knowing that love of God just changes everything, doesn't it? And it changes the words that we say and the way we can encourage and bless others.

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Jo-Anne*

So let me pray as we conclude. Lord, I just thank you so much for your love and grace to each one of us. Thank you for the words of life you have spoken into each one of our hearts. And Lord, I pray right now that our words to one another at the table will be life forgiving in every way.

May they speak sincere love, respect, and acceptance to our brothers and sisters. May they show empathy and compassion. May they encourage and affirm. And above all, may they speak blessing, forgiveness, and great peace. In your name, Lord. Amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Holy Forever by Brian Johnson, Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Jenn Johnson, Phil Wickham

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

And so, father, may the words that we speak to you, words of worship, thanksgiving and praise, may the words that we speak to one another reflect your heart for each person that we speak with. That there would be words of encouragement. That they would be life giving. Spoken sincerely, but spoken in order to build up, to strengthen, to build faith that would move by your spirit. Lord, may we do this well. Amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Thank you. Jo-Anne. Thank you, Rebecca. Thanks, Reuben and team. I feel like it's now just time to practice. So go and do. Also, if anyone would like prayer this morning for anything, the team down here would love to pray with you. May the Lord bless you as you speak words of life to one another.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*