

“How Do We Speak Without Words?”

Luke 2:1-20

Fifth of Six in the sermon series: “How Does a Weary World Rejoice?”

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit of
The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741
Email: home@first-church.org
Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

The final Christmas meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, December 24, 2023, dedicated to all the children across the globe who speak to us tonight without words – with their eyes, their tears, their laughter, their humming, their cooing, their hunger, their fullness, their emptiness, their love, especially for my seven grandchildren, Benton, Ethan, Aaden, Rylan, Emryn, Axel, and Hazel and always to the glory of God!

“How Do We Speak Without Words?”

Luke 2:1-20

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth the meditations of each one of your hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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A few days ago, the children of Wonderland Childcare across the street came to church. In strollers (four wide) and holding on to those dear little ropes, holding hands with a partner, 2, 3, 4, and 5 years olds they left their building across the street and entered our church and sanctuary. They came to say “thank you” to all of us for our love and kindness to them. They brought little “thank you” cards, and they sang, “We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!” There were 32 beautiful children singing and bringing the joy of Christmas alive right before my eyes.

One little boy said nothing and sang nothing. He just entered the sanctuary, stood in front of me and looked up. Standing tall – about three inches below my knees, with his beanie covering his ears and his coat all zipped-up, he was facing me. If I hadn’t looked down, I would have tripped over him. No arms

reaching up. No words spoken. Just deep brown eyes looking right at me. I knelt down and asked him if he would like me to take off his beanie and coat. With the slightest of head nods – he answered. So, I set to work – beanie off, coat unzipped, and with a little spin move his coat was off. No words were exchanged. A slight smile, a look into his deep brown eyes, and a hug. That was it. And when he left, we went through all those steps all over again. No words were exchanged. But love was shared in my smile to him and his deep brown eyes looking back and shining God’s light back to me. His eyes said it all.

We want to put words to everything. We want to express ourselves about everything. We feel a need to speak about all our thoughts, feelings, opinions and so much more. But often our words fail us. Sometimes words aren’t there. Sometimes words don’t work. Sometimes words get caught in our throats, in our minds, in our hearts, and even in our eyes.

Christmas is a time when words often fail us – even though we return to them, again and again and again. Our carols and prayers; our scripture and our sermons – words, words, words. But between the words and embedded in the silence and stillness, we discover Christmas.

On the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Joseph silently walks beside the donkey carrying the expectant Mary. As she labors through the night to give birth to her firstborn son, the sounds in the barn accompany the birth of Jesus. In the moments before the Angels sing “glory,” the shepherds encounter the light of God and are filled with fear. When they arrive at the stable, the shepherds share the good news, and silently, Mary listens, treasuring all their words and pondering them in her heart.

“Wordless wonder.” It happens to us all the time. It will happen tonight when we behold the Drama of the Nativity. Wonderless wonder is the work of Christmas.

One of my favorite stories comes from Christian doctors serving in rural India many years ago. The husband and wife served a predominantly Muslim and Hindu community, and they did so selflessly and lovingly. Often their patients would ask why they didn't have a cross in front of their little hospital. They would say, "if we do the work of Jesus Christ, to heal and care compassionately for you, that is all that matters. Action speaks louder than words."

One day, a huge crowd of people approached the hospital. Both doctors went to the front porch to see what was happening. Just as the crowd of Muslim and Hindu people arrived at the front steps, the sea of people parted, and out of the midst of the crowd came a large cross – one which could be seen from far away. The people said, "we want to honor you and your God as you have honored us through your love and care – by placing this cross in front the clinic. We want the world to know you represent the best of Jesus to all of us." Wordless wonder.

Wordless wonder is the work of Christmas and the work of Christians. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." May the wordless wonder of God's love this Christmas speak to you and through you– tonight and forevermore. Amen.

