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Breaking the Silence

Proverbs 31:8-9

Our society is filled with words. Most studies agree that the average person speaks anywhere from 1,000 to 16,000 words every single day. Our words have power and with every generation, we discover new ways to make our words known to the world.

While there was a time when powerful words were limited in their reach, we now live in an age of limitless expression where words can be shared with anyone, in any place, at any time. Through **Twitter, Facebook, ooVoo, skype, Facetime, blogger, Text, email, chat, messenger, web stream** and more, we can now broadcast our words instantly for the entire world to hear or see.

When we have an opinion about something happening the world, we can post it in our status. When we see something that we like or don't like, we can respond instantly and copy others on an email. When we want to celebrate or choral others to join a specific cause, we can host an audio or video conference. And when there is something pressing on your mind that must be shared, you can post a tweet, blog or send a mass text, just to cover your bases. Yes, our society is filled with words and these words represent the views of individuals, groups, and institutions.

Yet, in the sea of societal words, there is still a **strange silence**. In the presence of a multitude of collective voices, there seems to be a unified absence. While the world speaks loud and clear on its views of tolerance or intolerance, the church is strangely silent. While the world is boisterous in words of opinion and speculation, the church is uniquely silent. While the needs of the least of these in our communities are trumpeted on tongues of unbelievers, the church is seemingly silent. And on issues affecting justice and equality, the church, it appears, is silent.

Now, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of words that pour forth from churches every single week. Millions of Americans hold membership in churches all over the country and are filled with words that aspire to bring life change. There is no lack of words that give comfort, words that uplift, words that encourage and words that inspire. The church is overflowing with words that justify, words that edify, words that glorify and words that sanctify. Yet in the plethora of words that the world hears from the church, I suggest to you tonight that what is missing in this day and age are words that ring of **freedom and justice for all**.

As we celebrate the legacy of **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, we also honor the era during Civil Rights when the church was not afraid to let her voice be heard. During the time of Rev. Dr. King, the church was not afraid to speak on behalf of those who needed jobs. During this historic era, the church was not afraid to speak on behalf of those who could not afford health care. It was not afraid to speak when black people could not vote.

It was not afraid to speak when poor people could not get proper housing. It was not afraid to speak when children were being marginalized. It was not afraid to speak when innocent lives were being taken. Black churches and white churches during the Civil Rights movement were not afraid to speak when they knew that lives were on the line. And these churches were not afraid to hear the sound of their unified voices ringing for the sake of their brothers and sisters who did not have what they deserved. During a time of legal injustice and social inequality, Rev. Dr. King was one of those brave souls who believed that the church had the capacity to speak and the audacity to be heard.

Today, as we reflect on the work of this man and this movement, I can't help but wonder why the collective modern church **embraces silence** on issues of social change. When people in our nation still cannot get **jobs**, I can't help but wonder why the church is silent. When **housing** is still an issue, even here in Charlotte, I can't help but wonder why the church is silent. When **educational** disparities are still prevalent based on wealth, I can't help but wonder why the church is silent. When our **prisons** are disproportionately filled with men of color, I can't help but wonder why we are still silent! And while there are individual churches and singular believers attempting to shed light on these relevant issues, the collective voice of the church is still silent!

And I wonder if perhaps what has silenced the unified church in matters of justice is **fear**. Fear of being too closely connected with the views of one political party over another. Fear of being labeled as conservative or liberal, traditional or progressive. Fear of

speaking on issues that might cause us to lose the financial support we so lavishly enjoy. Fear of putting ourselves on the line without knowing exactly what we're getting into.

Because of fear, we call ourselves "sticking to the Bible" when in reality, our lack of speaking on issues of justice could cause us to deny what we so dearly believe. But in our text today, I believe that God is calling the modern American church to **break the silence**. Somebody say, "Break the Silence!!" God is calling us to break the silence of oppression, break the silence of injustice, break the silence of disparities, break the silence on poverty, break the silence on unemployment, and break the silence on societal ills.

After all, the Body of Christ is the only organism with the power to provoke lasting change. For it is by the **Word of God** that the world was created. It is by God's spoken word that enemies are destroyed. It is by the Word of God that lives our transformed and it is by God's Word spoken within each of us that we have breath in our bodies and life in our souls. God's Word is the only word that has power and God has given power in the words spoken by His church. My brothers and sisters, I believe that God is calling the church to speak and not just to speak as individuals with opinions on various issues, but God is calling the church to speak as one, to believe as one, to declare as one that we serve a God who cares about justice, freedom, and equality for all of His children.

So, if God is calling us to speak, the question is how shall we speak? In *Proverbs 31:8-9*, King Lemuel's wise mother shared her wisdom on how the king might use his voice. As a church whom God has equipped with a strong voice and a broad technological reach, there is much that we can learn from the scriptures on how we can break the silence and speak on issues that reach the heart of God.

The first thing that we can do to break the silence is **SPEAK OUT**. Speaking out refers to the horizontal responsibility of our words toward each other. It embodies the outward movement of speaking on behalf of someone other than yourself. Speaking out is repeatedly admonished in scripture, as we are encouraged to speak out for the poor and needy. In matters of justice, we are called to speak out for those who cannot speak, to give voice to issues that others may ignore and to provide space in the circles of our lives for those who may not be allowed in. In speaking out, we refuse to remain silent when opportunities present themselves to share the needs of others. In speaking out, we give way to the notion that every voice deserves to be heard. In speaking out, we acknowledge that there are people in our community that suffer present injustice and to honor their lives, we speak their names.

We speak out on behalf of **Lee** who still needs a job after two years of homelessness. We speak out on behalf of **Sarah** who is teased in school because of her dark skin. We speak out on behalf of **Rosa** who stands in need of medical attention. We speak out on behalf of **Robbie** being punished for a crime he did not commit. When we speak out, we give

voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and ovation to the overlooked. If we are to break the silence, we must first speak out!

Secondly, we can break the collective silence of the church in the world when we **SPEAK UP**. Speaking up refers to the vertical relationship of our words toward and about God. Whereas the world believes that the source of power rests within us, we know that the source of all things rests in God. When we speak up, we cease to remain silent on issues concerning our faith in God and God's ability to bring justice on our behalf. By speaking up, we give glory to God and acknowledge that true justice can only come from One who is just and true equality can only come from One who is equal to none.

We speak up when we bring our concerns of inequality to God and when we bring God into the spheres of inequality. We speak up when we intercede for those in need and when we remind others that *our God shall supply all our needs according to His riches in glory!* When we speak up we also look up to *the hills from which cometh our help knowing that our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.* When we speak up, we say to the world that we are *not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of salvation to everyone who believes.*

As we break the temptuous silence that taunts the collective voice of the church in social justice, we must speak out and we must speak up, but lastly, we must **SPEAK NOW** or

forever hold our peace. Throughout the scriptures, there is a theme of urgency that is echoed through various voices. Paul expressed this urgency to the early church to do what she could because Christ was coming back soon. John reminded believers in his Revelation that a time was coming and is now approaching when Son of God would conquer the world. Throughout the New Testament, there is a sense of urgency because the early church understood that Jesus was coming back soon.

They knew that there was much to do before the Lord's return. They knew that the time to be obedient was today because tomorrow was not promised for anyone. With this sense of urgency, they took care of orphans and widows. With this sense of timing, they sold what they had for the poor and needy. In this knowledge of God, they spoke boldly for the world to hear and were willing to risk their lives because they wanted God to be pleased when He came back for them.

Rev. Dr. King and those that served with him understood that the time to speak for justice was not tomorrow, but **today**. They knew that the time to speak out for others and speak up for God was not later, but **now**. They were not afraid of dogs or fire hoses. They were not afraid of lynching or police mobs. They were not afraid of the things of this world because they knew that Jesus was coming back for them one day. And with this knowledge they spoke boldly in the world because the time for justice was not later, but **now**.

As 21st century believers in the Lord Jesus, I *urge you* not to get comfortable in longevity. As agents of change, I *beg you* not to be lulled into thinking that we have all day to speak for justice. Because if Jesus was coming soon during the days of the apostles, then surely He's coming soon **now**. If Jesus was coming soon during the days of Dr. King, then surely He's coming soon **now**. And if we want to hear him say "well done" then the time to speak is not later, but **now**.

So speak now and give voice to the voiceless.

Speak now and give glory to God.

Speak now and let justice roll down like waters.

Speak now and let righteousness flow like a stream.

Speak now and let oppression be silenced.

Speak now and set God's children free.

Speak now and when we speak as one, we'll sing as they did with Dr. King, "We Shall Overcome.."