

Jesus' numerous exorcisms brought freedom to many who were troubled and oppressed by the work of evil spirits and Jesus himself encountered personal opposition and battle with Satan when he was put to the test in the wilderness just before his public ministry (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1).

The September 8, 1947 cover of *Time Magazine* improbably depicts the demure C. S. Lewis accompanied by a fiercely impish devil poised on his left shoulder, a caricature of his infamous fictional protagonist, Screwtape, AKA, Senior Tempter of Hell. Few people in 1947 were writing about demons and their ilk, and still fewer believed in them enough to bother speculating on this question: What if we could see what the temptation of our souls looks like through the eyes of the other side? In other words, what if we could interview a demon?

That was Lewis's premise for one of his most popular works the *Screwtape Letters* in an ingenious preface, Lewis purports to be beneficiary of the intercepted letters of a senior devil Screwtape to an apprentice devil Wormwood.

The story unfolds as a chronological series of letters that captures the downs and ups of Wormwood, Screwtape's nephew, who is trying to use what weapons he has, lies, deceptions, doubts, to undermine the faith of his "patient," a young man whom we first meet as one struggling to believe, and then who is on and under trial as a new Christian.

The idea for Screwtape actually occurred to Lewis while he sat in church during a boring sermon (an experience with which many men and women might identify). It is a classic reversal story—that is, it turns upside down our expectations and affiliations; for example, Satan is revered and referenced as "Our Father Below," while Jesus is termed, simply, "the Enemy." Lewis's main intention is to illuminate the psychology of temptation for believers—but also to illustrate the severe limitations and outright ignorance that pervades the underworld as it seeks to undermine God's purposes. Screwtape never understands why the Enemy loves the patient, the young man even to the point of giving up His life for another.

Do you believe the devil is real or just a figment of the imagination? Most people I talk to don't believe in the devil or see him at best as symbolic, while a minority have a prurient over interest. Were C.S. Lewis alive today, he would regard this general disbelief in the devil with dismay. In his preface to the *Screwtape Letters* he wrote the following "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." (1)

Lewis's understanding of the devil was shaped by Holy Scripture. There we see that Satan deceived and seduced Eve to disobey God (Genesis. 3), inflicted great harm upon Job and his family (Job 1-2), tempted Jesus (Matthew. 4), and later inspired Judas to betray him. Knowing all of this, Peter urges believers to "...be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith..." (1 Peter.5:8- 9). And, Paul urges us to "put on the full armour of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood..." (Ephesians.6:11). It seems to me that we underestimate or over estimate the devil at our peril...

Why do we speak? It's sort of a silly question. It's such a given in our lives – we talk, chat, write, text, email, send emojis, create memes, learn new languages, sing, and speak. The individual voice adds a layer of complexity to our words; no one speaks quite the way you speak. We speak all the time (some of us more than others...), and we do it for all sorts of reasons. Because we need something, because we want something, because we want to offer something, because we long for expression of self, because we long for connection and communication is a quick means to that end. We speak because something inside of us needs to get outside of us. Why do we speak?

Some scientists who study the origins of language say that humans started speaking because we needed to negotiate. To work together. To exchange various goods. To ensure safety for our community or tribe. We evolved to use our tongues and throats and mouths in particular ways so that we could live together – so we might even flourish together.

Speaking is particular to humans. Yes, all sorts of animals communicate – with song and motions and gestures and even languages of movement. But humans speak – with verbs and nouns and adjectives, stringing sentences together. We're mammals of meaning-making, knitting together words and words until we speak our way into connection, building society as we go, creating things like global trade and space rockets that travel to the moon and nuclear weapons that threaten to destroy everything we've ever made.

Why do we speak? How could we not? Why do Christians speak? How do we speak? What do we speak? The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle this morning, says, quoting a psalm, "I believed, and so I spoke." He goes on in the present tense: and so, "We also believe, and so we speak." (2 Corinthians 4.13)

This is at the heart of Christian speech. Our speech should flow from our belief; we speak because we believe. What have you spoken this week? Reflect on the words that came out of you. Did they reflect your trust in Jesus Christ? Did they come from a place of faith? What did you say and how did you say it?

We fall short of St Paul's words – we often don't speak because we believe. Timid in the public sphere, afraid of talking about our faith, scared that we'll offend someone, nervous that we'll get it wrong. We'd rather "preach with our lives" than with our lips.

It's difficult to put words to our faith, isn't it? Even for a preacher, even for someone who has studied the faith for years and years, it can still be a challenge, to bring to light that letter that is written on our hearts.

But there is a letter written on your heart. Christ himself wrote it. It goes something like this, "You are beloved. I created you, I came to be with you, I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are not alone in this life or in your death. Your sins have been forgiven, you have been made new. I will not leave you or forsake you. You are mine."

Funnily, we might need to stop speaking so that we can listen to Christ's letter on our hearts. So that we might hear his words to us, his voice that calls our names, his speech of peace and goodness and love. By listening to the letter written on our hearts, by listening to the words of Jesus, by being pulled ever deeper into the story of God, we might then learn to speak from such a place. To read this letter out loud to the world around us.

Many Anglicans have long loved the likes of the quote attributed to St. Francis – “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” However at this point in the life of our Church, it is necessary, necessary to use words, to begin speaking our belief. To excavate that letter written on our hearts and to share that letter with others. How else will they know the glorious story of Jesus Christ? How else will they know that they are not defined by their worst sin? How else will they know that there is a family of God waiting to welcome them with open hearts? How else will they know that God is for them?

We share the letter written on our hearts, because it is a gift given to us by God. It is the greatest love letter of all time. And who doesn’t want to receive a love letter? Who doesn’t want to hear that they are beloved by the Creator of heaven and earth, that they are known for who they truly are, that they’ve been given gifts to use for the good purposes of God, that they can change for the good, that there is hope even in the mess, that in the end, love has won.

To keep such a message to ourselves, to bury it deep within us, is to slow the movement of the Spirit, the message of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. It is meant to be believed. It is meant to be spoken. It is meant to be lived.

Christ has written a letter on your heart. He has created you to speak it to those near and far. Will you proclaim it boldly to the world around you?

Fr Robert Newton

1) *The Screwtape Letters* CS Lewis 1942