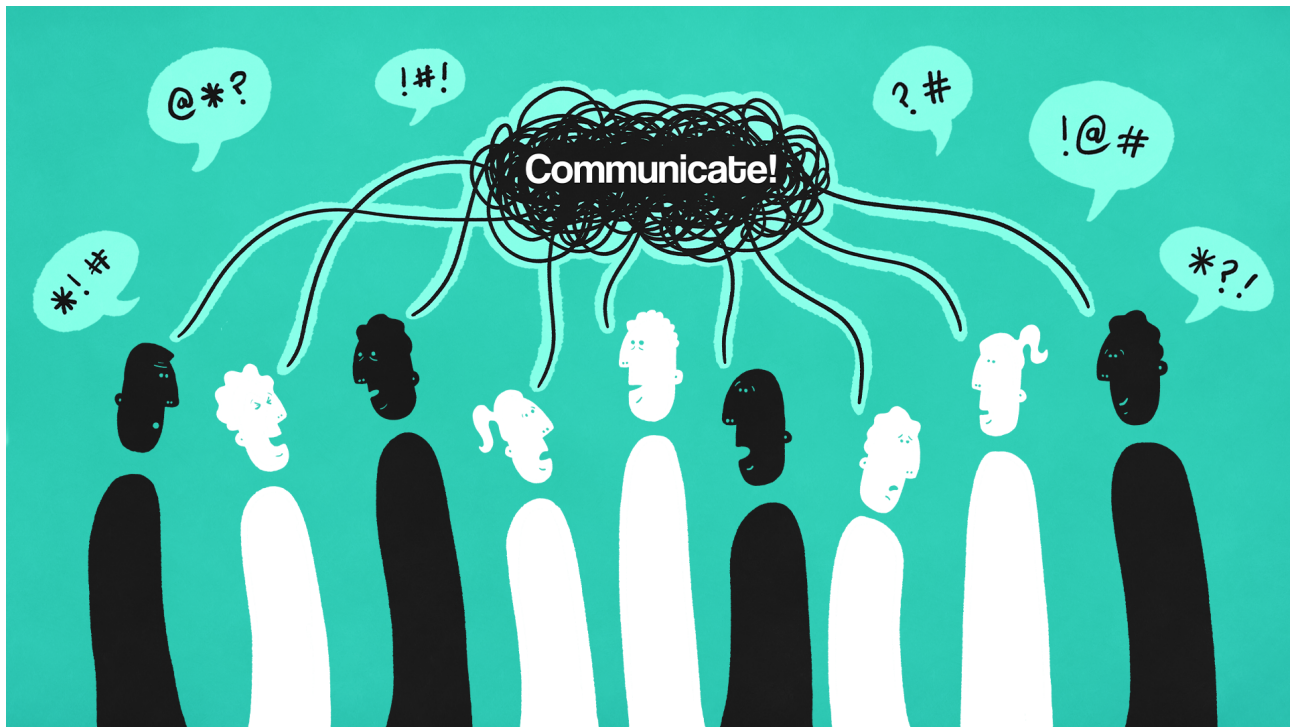


Communicate!

New Year 2023 (1-28 Jan)



Words, gestures, expressions, signs, body language, dance, pictures, rhythm, singing, silences... we humans speak volumes... and constantly. There are myriad ways of communicating with one another and with God. Over time we tend to develop habits for how we pray, worship, sing, or generally express ourselves to God and each other. There is a richness in these repeating patterns, of saying words handed down through the years or walking in the same steps as our ancestors, but we can also sometimes end up 'checking out'. We can find ourselves no longer really *communicating*, simply going through the motions with no connection.

Because often, as Marshall MacLuan famously said, the medium is the message! It's not just a matter of *what* we say to God and to one another, it's *how* we say it. Established, enriching life-giving traditions are a great way of communicating *if* they are expressed in an enriching and life-giving way. If we're half asleep, zoned out and shutting down... not so much. What sparked the original tradition is no longer coming alive if we are just ticking the boxes.

There are so many ways of communicating with God and that's fantastic. Sometimes we have prioritised particular ways over others as habits change. It's worth remembering that while we can tune out by just thoughtlessly repeating ourselves we can also miss the point by chasing novelty and excitement at the expense of communicating. A case of all noise and no signal.

When someone's worship, their way of communicating to God, is strikingly different to ours we can get caught up in the differences. Rather than wondering if they've found new

ways of saying the same things, we get suspicious and assume they're saying something different. God loves humanity and wants us to be diverse and varied. It is brilliant that there are countless ways we can communicate with God and many ways God can communicate with us (not least of all through Communion!) and the key is keeping open and heartfelt in how we respond to divine love.

So this month, at the start of a new year, we want to explore what happens when we refocus on the communication itself — not the *what* of being and doing church but the *how*. Faith is like sharing a story, or a telling joke, or singing a song — it's not just a matter of remembering all the details, getting everything in the right order, and hitting the notes. Timing, expression, delivery, phrasing, pauses — it's all part of it. Our faith needn't be a technically proficient but soulless masterpiece. God delights in the heartfelt running up and down of the keys, honestly played and expressed.

When we pray God doesn't sit there with a notepad transcribing everything and scrolling on his phone in the bits when we're not 'talking'. God listens to the pauses and the silences, too. Like a good friend — who can instantly tell when you've had good news or bad news before you even open your mouth — but even more so, God knows you.

So we have been on a journey these last three months — looking back on our **Legacy of Hope**, being in the present and **Finding Time** in the here and now through the timeless season of Advent, and now at the start of a new year we look to the future thinking about how we can take what we've learned and *Communicate!*

SETTING THE SCENE: We are continuing to experiment with having a visual/multi-sensory motif for each week. The idea is that this word provides an additional focus point for preparing services or multimedia inspired by the material. It is not intended to be restrictive and is simply a suggestion to combine with the theme prompts to inspire creative responses.

SEEDS TO SOW: We also have an additional *Seeds to Sow* phrase. These are open-ended and optional and again are designed for people wanting to develop their own resources in response to the material. Perhaps you could use these prompts to inspire a time of prayer, or drawing, or creative writing? They short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination, be encouraged to tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the four week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

Written and read (1 January)

One of the most obvious ways we communicate with God and with one another is through reading and writing. We read ancient texts and write songs and prayers and sermons in response. We read poetry, we journal, we look up commentaries, we write letters, send messages. The written word is an uncanny thing. It's a way of outsourcing memory, ideas and emotion, holding on to truths and preserving a legacy. It is a workshop for language where we can craft new ideas and express complex concepts. It's also a way of remembering to get milk. And to tell someone you love them. Our lives are full of writing, and as we read and write we do so alongside the one who read the stars and wrote the fabric of reality into being.

SETTING THE SCENE: **WRITING ON THE WALL**

SEEDS TO SOW: **HOW DOES CREATION SING?**

1. Psalm 119:
10-11, 105-106
(New Year's Day)
 1. **The word that lights the way in this new year.** God's word, hidden in our hearts, is a lamp that links us to the past and guides us in to the future.
 2. **Expansive words.** Think of the scope and range of this psalm, the vivid vista of praise. How can we learn to 'read' nature's worship?
 3. **The written legacy that Jesus has been there with us.** These verses resonate because of the legacy we can read about in the gospels.
 4. **So that my soul may praise you and not be silent...** Poetry, such as the timeless language of the psalms, has a way of capturing things that are hard to in prose. The Bible doesn't just have an enduring legacy of wisdom but also of beauty.
 5. **A servant of the gospel.** A written of letters that changed and continue to change the world...
 6. **Choosing not to bring word.** The wise men elect not to tell Herod where to find Jesus, opting to leave for their own country by a different road.
 7. **The writing's on the wall.** Sometimes we can't read what's right in front of us.
2. Psalm 148
3. Hebrews 2:
10-18
4. Psalm 30
5. Ephesians 3:
1-12
6. Matthew 2: 1-12
(Epiphany)
7. Daniel 5

Voiced (8 January)

Laughing, sighing, singing, sobbing, shouting, mumbling, whispering, humming — our voices are a rolling broadcast of our lives. A lot of our faith is mediated through the voice, whether it's the voice in our head thinking things through, the heartfelt belting it out on a Sunday, the quiet bedside prayer, or the still small voice at the heart of the universe. Our faith is not just about the words we say, it's about how we say them, and indeed the things we say without words — the yells, the cries, the weeping, the groaning, the whistling, the chortling, the breathing.

SETTING THE SCENE: **DISCIPLES IN CONVERSATION ON THE ROAD**

SEEDS TO SOW: **DO YOU HAVE A 'PRAYER VOICE'?**

1. **Isaiah 42: 1-4**
 1. **A gentle voice.** Unpacking the power of this voice that does not need to shout or yell.
2. **Psalm 29**
 2. **The dynamic range of God.** From the thundering voice here to the gentleness of Jesus and the groans and sighs too deep for words from the Spirit (see day 7 below) the Trinity has *range!* We are made in the image of God and our God is *expressive*, do we respond with a range of expression to God?
3. **Acts 10: 34-43**
 3. **Voice by voice.** The message spreads. Before it was written down this message was told voice by voice. Think of all the different types and tones of voice that carried the gospel on their breath.
4. **Matthew 3: 13-17**
 4. **The frequency of heaven.** Heaven declared Jesus's worth and heaven declares our worth too when we tune in.
5. **Acts 12: 1-11**
 5. **Realising reality.** Peter didn't realise at first that what was happening was actually really happening. Contemplating the relationship between words and reality. How words can help us see what's right in front of us AND fail to grasp it too.
6. **Acts 12: 12-17**
 6. **Rhoda recognises.** What we recognise in the voices of others.
7. **Romans 8: 22-27**
 7. **Wordless worship.** We can communicate vocally without communicating verbally. From vocalising through song to sighs, and yells and groans. The Holy Spirit is there with us beat for beat.

Heart on our sleeves (15 January)

Without saying a word we can speak volumes. The heart of human beings is often to be found on our sleeves, out for the world to see. Facial expression, posture, pacing, mannerisms, gestures, body language, dancing, bowing, kneeling we have fathomless ways of tuning into God and one another. What are we 'saying' in our lives and actions? How can we be more creative in how we 'speak' to God and about God to others?

SETTING THE SCENE: **DANCE FLOOR**

SEEDS TO SOW: **THINK OF WAYS OF PRAYING WITHOUT USING YOUR VOICE**

1. 2 Samuel 6:14-22
 2. Psalm 40: 1-11
 3. 1 Corinthians 1:
1-9
 4. Matthew 11:
2-11
 5. John 1: 29-42
 6. Isaiah 40: 27-31
 7. Ephesians 4:
25-32
1. **Dancing with all his might.** Quite a scene.
 2. **Verbs and movement.** There's a lot of moving going on in the dynamic poetic language of this psalm.
 3. **...for in every way you have been enriched in him.** What does this enrichment look like?
 4. **'Go and tell John what you hear and see'.** Beyond what we talk about in our faith — what else are we communicating through our actions?
 5. **Come and see.** Considering seeing and believing.
 6. **We are enthused by the power of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** Exploring discipleship and inhabiting the physicality of bodies and minds renewed by God.
 7. **Tender hearted communicators.** A compelling calling that goes beyond mere words.

See, feel, taste, know (22 January)

Symbols, imagery, visions, observations, tastes.

We see, we feel, we taste, we know.

SETTING THE SCENE: **A BROKEN YOKE**

SEEDS TO SOW: **CONSIDER VISUAL DETAILS FOUND IN THE READINGS**

1. Isaiah 9: 1-4
 2. Psalm 27
 3. 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25
 4. Matthew 4: 18-22
 5. Psalm 61
 6. Ezekiel 37: 1-14
 7. 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26
1. **Breaking the yoke.** A powerful image.
 2. **Seeing shelter with the Lord.** The importance of imagery that lasts over thousands of years.
 3. **The message of the Cross.** A living picture.
 4. **The image of fishing nets left behind.** This last image is important.
 5. **Rock, tower, tent, wings.** Being lead to the higher rock.
 6. **Knitting together the bones.** The work of taking the bones of something and bringing it to life...
 7. **Communion — ultimate communication.** We end our month on communication thinking about how God communicates with us through Communion.