
Good Words to You

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

I remember from years ago a popular feature on the morning radio show known as “Morning Edition.” In those days, I lived in Cumming, Georgia, and—like everybody up there—I drove a lot. It took thirty minutes to two hours for me to get anywhere—to church, to the hospitals here in Atlanta, to various meetings, to folks’ homes.

So, I listened to the radio a lot. Talk radio was just beginning its ascent, and Morning Edition may have been in its prime. On one particular day each week, the host, Bob Edwards, would interview a famous linguist named John Ciardi. What a wise man he seemed to be!

Ciardi, week by week, would investigate the meanings and the origins of words. He could take an ordinary word like “noon” and produce a wealth of information and history about it. Thus, the word somehow became more meaningful, more useful. At the conclusion of his allotted radio time, he would always sign off by saying, “This is John Ciardi; good words to you.”

“Good words to you.” That phrase has stuck with me ever since. A good man, or a good woman, is hard to find, we say. But good words might be even harder to find. Good words are hard to find.

We do not always hear good words these days. We do not always hear good words in the office break room. We do not always hear them in carpool lines, on the internet, on our radios and televisions, in our newspapers. We do not always hear good words at the dinner table, in our memos and reports, in the bed before we fall asleep.

Sometimes we are actually more eager to hear bad words than we are to hear good words. Alice Roosevelt Longworth is reported to have said, “If you haven’t got anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me.” It’s amazing how fast bad words travel compared to good words. Winston Churchill declared, “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

In the times of our ancestors, the most important thing we could pass on to each other, from generation to generation, was not wealth. When a person died, the most important thing he or she left to the children was not land, not the house, not the family jewels. The most important things a person left to his offspring were good words. Folks called these good words, “blessings.” In Greek (as Ciardi would say), the root meaning of the word for blessing is “good word.” A blessing is a good word.

Surely you remember the story of Jacob and Esau, scrambling about for their father’s blessing. I believe our children are still scrambling about for blessing. It may look like they are scrambling for other things: attention, power, money, identity. But that’s not it. What all of us want, at root, is blessing.

Consider the father telling his son, “You were great out on that field today. You passed that ball, you made that block, you defended that goal in a spectacular way.” That is the way of blessing. Consider a mother telling her daughter, “You were great on that field today. You passed that ball, you made that block, you defended that goal in a spectacular way.” That is the way of blessing.

Our children imitate us. If they hear us curse, then they will curse. If they hear us bless, then they will bless. What our

children need, what we need, what the world needs, are good words. Those good words make a difference. When we speak good words to each other, when we bless one another, God lives. Yes, God lives in our blessings.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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