

The Silver Box with a bow on top

Florence Littauer is a well know American public speaker. Some years ago she was to speak at a Conference and the previous day she attended church. The minister noted she was there and invited her to come up and say a few words adding, 'Why don't we get Florence to give the children's sermon?'

Unused to such a talk, she quickly thought of a verse of scripture (Ephesians 4:29) and announced it to the children. The verse she read was from St Paul, she explained. *'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.'*

Florence asked what this verse meant. First, she asked 'let **no evil talk** come out of your mouths'. Quickly she was advised by one of the children that this meant 'don't use bad words'. When asked 'like what', one boy began to give examples! Florence quickly said she didn't want to hear the words, she just wanted to know what kind of things were bad words. Swearing, nasty, vulgar, criticising, hurtful and loud, were all examples she was given. Florence was able to agree that these words were 'bad' words.

Next she asked 'what is **edifying**' and she was told by one girl 'it means to 'build up'. When she asked how could you build up, one boy said 'it's like when you're playing with building blocks; you shouldn't knock down other people's building blocks'. Florence was able to get the children to explain to her that words could be like this. They could knock down other people's building blocks, but they should not do this, instead they should build up by using good words.

Then Florence asked the children, 'what about the end part of St Paul's words. He says 'speak as fits the occasion, that it may **impart grace** to those who hear.' One girl suggested this meant when you speak you should give a present to the other person. Florence quickly agreed and asked the girl 'what sort of present'? The girl said when you talk you should think of giving a present like a silver box with a bow on top.'

At the Conference the following day. Florence told the audience of these insightful comments and in particular about the silver box. On the second day of the Conference a woman spoke to Florence and explained that when she went home she thought about the silver box and reflected that she had not spoken nicely to her teenage son in quite a long time, and in fact she hadn't spoken too nicely to her husband in recent days. She said "I made some silver boxes with bows on top and I put one outside my sons room, one outside our bedroom and one in the kitchen and lounge, and I explained to my son and husband why. It is amazing just in that one day what a difference it has made.

Florence began to share this story on her speaking circuit and says without realising she started a Movement. She has received thousands of letters from people who have said what a difference it has made in their home, workplace or school when they have made silver boxes and put them in places to remind them to speak good words to others.

She reflected that her father had always encouraged her and spoken to her positively and that he used to sing to her 'Home, home on the range; where the deer and the antelope play. Where never is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day'. What a different world it would be she challenges, if 'never was heard a discouraging word'. What if people spoke to others as if they were presenting them with a silver box with a bow on top.

Reflection: Silver Boxes (Florence Littauer)

My words were harsh & hasty
And they came without a thought.
Then I saw the pain & anguish
That my bitter words had brought.

Bitter words that I had spoken
Made me think back through the past;
Of how many times I'd uttered
Biting words whose pain would last.

Then I wondered of the people
I had hurt by things I'd said;
All the ones I had discouraged
When I didn't use my head.

Then I thought about my own life
Of painful words I've heard;
And of the times I'd been discouraged
By a sharp and cruel word.

And now clearly I remember
All the things I might have done;
But, by a word I was discouraged
And they never were begun.

So, help my words be silver boxes,
Neatly wrapped up with a bow;
That I give to all so freely,
As through each day I gladly go.

Silver boxes full of treasure,
Precious gifts from above;
That all the people I encounter
Might have a box of love