

"Taming The Tongue To Teach the Truth"

James 3:1-12

September 13, 2015

16th Sunday After Pentecost

Today is Rally Day, a time of new beginnings for our Sunday School and Midweek Classes. It is a day of excitement, a day of celebration, and a day of obedience. Obedience, you say? Yes! Our church and many other churches are quite obedient to the beginning of our text for today where it says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers." When Jennifer and others who have her position in other churches go searching for Sunday School teachers in preparation for this day, they find that not many people want to become teachers.

Why is this? Some may not wish to commit to teaching every Sunday. Some may be afraid of speaking in front of a group like a Sunday School class. Still others may be afraid of not knowing what to say or of saying the wrong thing. This last reason implies that what is said is important. Words have power and, if used wrong, can be harmful. The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," is simply wrong. Words CAN hurt us. The admonition at the beginning of our text is made because false teachers can hurt people spiritually with their words.

James goes on to describe the danger here by talking about the tongue. The tongue is a mighty weapon, even though it is a very small part of our body. James says a bit is tiny but it is powerful enough to control a big strong horse. A rudder is small but is powerful enough to steer a mighty ship. In the same way, a tongue is a small member of our bodies, yet it is powerful enough to boast of great things.

Though small, a tongue can do great harm through evil words. James says a forest can be set ablaze and destroy the land through a tiny spark (something we in Montana should easily recognize). In the same way, a tongue can set a blaze of evil and literally destroy people. You've probably experienced that, either in saying hurtful words or hearing hurtful words said to you. You can destroy a person with what you say and you can be destroyed by the words of another.

The scariest thing about the tongue is in the last point of comparison which James makes. He says, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed, but no human can tame the tongue.” Try as hard as you can, but you just can’t control your tongue and the harmful things you say with it. James is quite blunt when he says, “[The tongue] is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

It seems hopeless. The tongue is tiny, yet powerful, and is able to destroy people with the words it produces – lies, gossip, and slander. Even the truth can be used to hurt and destroy people when used for evil purposes. And we are unable to stop or even control this flow of evil destructive words.

Yet there is another word – a good word – which is able to produce good and not evil; to rescue and not destroy; to build up and not tear down; to give life in place of death. It is not a Word produced by the tongue of any human being. This Word comes from the mouth of God and was sent by Him great in power, yet humble in appearance. This Word was sent to do great good, rather than great harm.

St. John describes this Word in the first chapter of His Gospel. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) To communicate the heart of God, the Word of God came from God to this world. This Word was no eloquent sermon, no object lesson, and no moral example. It was much more. The Word was God Himself.

St. John goes on to say, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). The Word comes, not in spoken form or written form, but in human form. The Word becomes flesh and blood and dwells among us.

The Father sends the Son to be His Word in the world. Jesus comes to do more than teach God’s love, explain God’s love, or even to be an example of God’s love. He comes to bring us God’s love. By becoming flesh and blood, the Word can take our place under the wrath of a holy God and

endure the punishment which our sins of deed, thought, and word have earned for us. By His death for us on the cross, the perfect sacrifice for sin is completed and we have full and complete forgiveness for all of our sins. We enjoy God's favor and presence among us. By His resurrection from the dead, death and hell have been overcome. We have new life now and the sure hope of life after death which is perfect and eternal in the direct presence of the Word.

You have God's love now through the Word by His Word, spoken and written for you. You have God's forgiveness now through the Word by His Word of absolution declared to you. You have new life now through the Word by His Word poured over you in the water of your Baptism.

Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) By abiding in the Word made flesh, you are His disciples. By abiding in the Word He spoke, you will know the truth of God's grace and mercy, His gifts and blessings, His promises and hope. And that truth will set you free – free from guilt, free from fear, free from despair, free from death, and free from hell.

It is this love, this truth and this hope which are to fill our words with and for one another, rather than the hatred, lies and hurt which often fill our words. Our tongues are not to be full of deadly poison, but full of healing grace. We are to use our words to bless one another, rather than to curse one another.

We bless one another when we are, as St. Paul said to the Ephesians, "speaking the truth in love." We speak the truth of God's Law and its condemnation of it by our transgressions so that we may speak the love of God and His forgiveness of all our sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ.

But to be able to bless one another and to speak the truth in love, we must first learn the words by which we are able to do this. These words to do this are to be found in the Word of God – Jesus Christ and in the Word of God – the Holy Bible. We are, from the day of our baptism, in the Word became flesh. We are to be in the Word, recorded for us in the Scriptures, also from that very day.

We begin learning the Word through Bible stories, hymns, and prayers which our parents teach us as children. We gather together to be in the presence of the Word made flesh and receive

His gifts in Divine Service. We learn the stories of the Word of God in Sunday School and preconfirmation class as we gain a solid foundation in the content of God's Word. We build on that foundation in catechesis as we not only learn the Word of God through the catechism but also how to apply and live that Word of God in every day life.

As we continue in that Word every Sunday at church and every day at home, we will know how and become accustomed to using our tongues to speak blessing and not cursing by speaking from the Word of God and not from our sinful heart. We can do this, not only in our interpersonal relationships with each other, but – who knows? – also in the role of teacher.

The title of today's sermon likely set a record for the use of "t"s in one title: Taming the Tongue to Teach the Truth. Hopefully, the title will help you to remember what today, as Rally Day, is all about and what every single day in the life of a Christian is about. We are to tame our tongues. This is done only by the Word of God used by the Holy Spirit. We are to teach the truth. This is found only in the Word of God led by the Holy Spirit. So let us be in the Word of God in Divine Service, in Sunday School, in catechism class, and in Bible Class so that, by God's power and His grace, we may always tame our tongues to teach the truth. Amen.