

“Eat Your Words”

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Providence United Methodist Church

September 20, 2015

The epistle lesson for today is taken from the book of James, chapter 3, verses 1 through 12. “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle.

If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.”

“How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.” This is God’s

word for God's people. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. God of perfect love and holiness, bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your words. Amen.

Remember that saying about sticks and stones? Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Not true and James points it out in twelve verses of Scripture. We can apologize for something we've said, but no matter how we try to smooth it over, it has the potential to change the relationship forever. Words are powerful!

The Bible has a fair amount to say about the words we speak. Proverbs 18 tells us that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Psalm 33 says by the word of the Lord were the heavens made and their starry host by the breath of his mouth. Isaiah 55 says God's word does not return unto him void, but it accomplishes that which he purposes and prospers in the thing for which he sent it.

Romans 10:9 says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved. In Matthew 8, all Jesus had to do was say the word and the centurion's servant was healed. Proverbs 12 states that reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Proverbs 16 says that a wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction. Proverbs 21 says that he who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

James says the tongue is a wild thing. One thing is certain, when words come out of our mouth that shouldn't come out it doesn't make someone's heart sing—in fact it does damage—and it can cause emotional hurt that never heals.

James says the tongue isn't controllable, and if someone could control it they'd be perfect—complete and mature. James hits home with the idea that control of the tongue leads to a master-control of ourselves and our lives. But wait! It goes deeper than that.

It's really a heart problem isn't it? We *can't think* without formulating thoughts into words; we *can't plan* without describing to ourselves step by step what we intend to do; we *can't imagine* without painting a word-picture inside our minds. We *can't resent* without fueling the fires of resentment in words we say inside our minds. We *can't feel sorry* of ourselves without listening to the self-pity we say to ourselves when we're on our soapbox. But if we just refused to think words of self-pity and resentment they'd shrivel up and die!!!

James gives an illustration. He talks about how small a rudder is on a huge boat, and yet it only takes one person to steer the boat. And the bit in a horse's mouth controls his entire body, but James says the tongue is a wild thing and its character is unruly. As humans, our thoughts, feelings, and words can be fickle. We can bless with our words, and we can curse with our words.

Most of us would agree that only God can change our heart and will. Either the tongue will be controlled by a nature that leaves God out of our interaction with others or it'll be controlled by the Holy Spirit. We can lock up this untamed beast called the tongue, we can keep it in its cage, we can eat our words, but maybe from a grandparent's point of view, there's something just as important as the words we speak.

Researchers have shown that a grandparent's presence in the lives of their grandchildren is directly linked to an increased emotional security. There's a great benefit to the child in just being around—just sharing activities together. And if your child has never had the benefit of grandparents, it can be anyone whom the child is developing a relationship with on a consistent basis—one of the great advantages of being in a church family!

Research also shows that a grandparent's presence gives a sense of well-being and adds to the child's ability to learn how to be more social. Let's face it,

the challenges of today's society, financially speaking, don't always promote the nurturing of intergenerational relationships. And especially in the last 10 years, kids have to move wherever the jobs can be found. But if the grandparents are able to be effective in their roles—it seems to be all about getting involved and being a figure of support and guidance.

So grandparents that have been able to be here today, continue to reach out to your grandchildren. When you've left your legacy of love after you're gone, not only will your words speak of the love you had but your very presence as a figure of strength will prove that your words of affection were deep and authentic.

Let' pray. Holy God who is perfect in everything that was and is ever spoken, change our preoccupation with self. Use our words to give praise to you, to preach in defense of the faith, and to bring the message of hope and God's love to our families. Help us use words rightly. Help us as people to be present in the lives of our families so our words would ring true. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.