

DEVOTIONAL: 5 – 11 May 2024

The Tongue, the Bridle, and the Blessing

Readings: James 3:1-12 ~ The Message Version

1-2 Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.

3-5 A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

5-6 It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

7-10 This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!

10-12 My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you? The Word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

James 3:1–12 contains the single most sustained discussion in the New Testament on the use of the tongue. For many the author of this little book is believed to be James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus. He is steeped in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament Scriptures and also in the teaching of the Lord Jesus, to which his own teaching has many parallels. Both the book of Proverbs and our Lord Jesus spoke with searching clarity about the nature and use of the tongue. James walks in their footprints. Much of what he says is a powerful exposé of the sin and failure that mar our speech.

In this way James's words exemplify the central purposes of the teaching and preaching of God's Word. The resulting effect will be to **“reprove, rebuke, and exhort”** (2 Timothy 4:2). But James's message also exemplifies what Paul calls the profitability or usefulness of sacred Scripture: **“teaching . . . correction . . . [child-]training.”**

In a word, the immediate focus of James's teaching — one might say the same of all apostolic teaching — *is to bring Christian believers to maturity*. Here, as well as in other places, he is completely in harmony with the way the apostle Paul employed all his God-given powers: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:28–29).

In fact, this is one of James's burdens also. His five chapters constitute an extended piece of pastoral preaching, laced as it is with words of wisdom and warning. All along his goal is to lead his readers and hearers — men and women who were possibly once under his direct pastoral care but are now widely scattered — *to full spiritual maturity*, so that their whole being, without reservation, *should be wholly Christ's*.

We find that this motif runs through the entire book. As we come upon it in chapter 3, James has already shown (1) how spiritual maturity develops through response to suffering, and (2) how spiritual maturity is enhanced by response to the

Word. Now he goes on to show that (3) spiritual maturity is evidenced by the use of the tongue. The mastery of it is one of the clearest marks of a whole person, a true Christian. Tongue-mastery is the fruit of self-mastery.

We all use our tongues. If the mastery of the tongue is a sign of maturity, it is so for all Christians. So, James 3:1–12 has general as well as specific application. How we use our tongues provides clear evidence of where we are spiritually.

When I was a child, our family physician used to ask us to stick out our tongues. (That was the only circumstance in which I was ever permitted to do that!) He seemed to be able to tell a great deal about our health by looking into our mouths. That is a parable of spiritual reality. What comes out of our mouths is usually an accurate index of the health of our hearts. Jesus said: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). So here, as a spiritual physician, James engages in a rigorous tongue analysis. James 3:1–12 is a veritable pathology laboratory in which analysis and diagnosis take place.

Notice James’s axiom: the mature person is able to “bridle” his tongue. The person who can do this is master of the whole body (note that some scholars take “body” here to refer to the church. The control of the tongue has both negative and positive aspects. It involves the ability to restrain the tongue in silence. But it also means being able to control it in gracious speech when that is required.

Nobody — Jesus excepted — has succeeded in mastering the tongue! Our only hope as we pursue the discipline of self that leads to mastery of the tongue is that we are Christ’s and that we are being made increasingly like him. But this battle for vocal holiness is a long-running one, and it needs to be waged incessantly, daily, hourly. Are we fighting it? We must seek to do so for a very important reason.

In James 3:3–5, James uses two commonplace but very vivid illustrations. The tongue is like the bit in the mouth of a horse. This tiny appliance controls the enormous power and energy of the horse and is used to give it direction. The tongue is also like the rudder in a boat; such a capacious and heavy vessel was directed simply by a turn of the rudder.

So, it is with the tongue. The tongue is small. But its power, both for good and for ill, is out of all proportion to its size. Why does James speak this way? Presumably out of both biblical knowledge and personal experience. The tongue carries into the world the breath that issues from the heart.

Alas, we do not realize how powerful for evil the tongue is because we are so accustomed to its polluting influence. Taking Bro. Martin to a doctor’s appointment on the 9th floor of the medical building, we rode the elevator with several others. On 3rd floor the elevator stopped, the doors opened, and a person entered the confined space. The doors closed, and I suspect everyone in the elevator almost instantaneously had the same thought: “This person has been smoking!” In this confined “smoke-free” environment their breath could not be disguised.

So, says Jesus, the tongue projects the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is from within, “out of the heart,” that the mouth speaks (**read Matthew 12:34; 15:18–19**). But like the smoker, so accustomed to the odor, the atmosphere in which they live, the person with polluted speech has little or no sense of it — no sense that they exhale bad breath every time they speak.

Yet there is another side to this, a wonderfully encouraging side. Scripture teaches us that the breath by which we express our deepest desires, instincts, and opinions may produce helpful and pleasing fruit. Writes the wise man of Proverbs 15:4: *a gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

So, James sees that the tongue is an instrument of extraordinary power, out of all proportion to its size. Whatever its anatomical connections, its most significant connection is to the heart — whether hardened by sin or recreated by grace.

At this stage James is chiefly concerned that we should have a sense of the convicting power of his teaching. For this reason, he began by addressing the difficulty of taming the tongue. It is a word spoken primarily to bring conviction of sin. For the

tongue is difficult, indeed impossible, to tame naturally, because, as we have also seen, it exercises power out of all proportion to its size.

Come back next week for the rest of the story...

YOU'RE NOT ALONE, LET US PRAY WITH YOU & FOR YOU

- Sincerest and heartfelt condolences are extended to Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, and the Pok Family, on the passing of their father and mother, **Mr. Jerry J. Pok and Mrs. Margret “Marge” Louise Pok** who God whispered their name on January 23, 2024, and February 2, 2024, and lovingly welcomed them to their eternal home. Their Celebration of Life Service with Military Honors for Mr. Jerry, will be held on Saturday, May 4, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. The Visitation will be from noon until 1:00 p.m. Cards and notes of sympathy and condolences can be mailed to: **Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, 1915 Hwy 28 E., Kewaskum, WI 53040.**
- **Mrs. Elizabeth “Betty” Nelson**, well known and beloved in the community of West Bend, passed away on March 12, 2024. We continue to keep the Nelson Family in our thoughts and prayers.
- Our beloved Christian sister, **Mrs. Joy Lynn Kuhaupt**, 69, of Sussex, passed away March 7, 2024, after a brief illness at Froedtert of Milwaukee. A Celebration of Life Service will June 8, 2024, at Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church. Card and notes of condolences and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Robert Kuhaupt, Sussex Mills Apts., W240 N6345 Maple Ave., #116, Sussex, WI 53089.**
- Your continued prayers for healing and strength for **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf** over the past years, has been needed and appreciated, as Ms. Janice suffered a major stroke, cancer, and cardiac surgery. **Mr. Allan Kempf** is suffering with the pain and stiffness of arthritis. Holy Spirit, thank You for being with Mr. Allan and Ms. Janice through all the ups and downs of their lives and for the many blessings God has given them for which they praise and thank God. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to **Mr. Allan and Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.**
- **Mrs. Nancy Whitson** extends her grateful appreciation to you for taking the time to send cards of love and support. Cards and notes of encouragement and support can be mailed to: **Mrs. Nancy Whitson, Aria of Brookfield, 18740 West Bluemound Road, Room 103, Brookfield, WI 53045.**
- **Bro. Bob Krell**, our beloved faithful brother is doing well and appreciative of your continued prayers and supported. Let us pray: I give you my worries and concerns and I ask for your guidance. You see it all, the outer circumstances, the inner turmoil. I know that you understand my life, that sometimes my heart weighs heavy with trouble. Right now I lay all these things before you. I breathe in, safe in the knowledge that I am held by grace. I breathe out, knowing that I am held secure in your arms. And I wait on you. For you are all truth, you are overflowing love, you are a beacon of hope and a fortress of faith. Lord, I choose to be attentive to your voice. May I be alert to your Spirit's guiding as I continue this journey. Amen. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Mr. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Mrs. Sandy Wamser** has had a little health setback, but she continues to be strong in her faith and grateful for your continued prayers, support, and love. Let us pray: Lord, You are the wind in my sails You guide me as I steer and find direction. You give me the strength to keep on going. You watch over me as I navigate stormy seas. You are the harbor where I stop for rest. You are my encourager when I lose hope. You are the lighthouse that keeps my path safe. You are with me always. Thank you. Amen. Cards and notes can be sent to: **Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- We continue our prayer vigil for **Mr. Dennis Liepert** on his extensive journey of recovery. Lord, you know me inside and out. You know about my pain and distress; you understand the fears of my heart. At the cross you endured unabating agony. You have gone before me into the darkness and emerged in power and glory. At this time I lean on You; I draw my strength from Your endless love and live in Your limitless grace trusting in You. Amen. Cards and notes of love and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Dennis and Mrs. Tammy Liepert, 7361 Tower Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**

- **Mr. Michael Cahoon**, son of Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and is still on a journey of healing. Lord, I reach out to you for your guidance. Please show me which way to turn. Calm my anxious thoughts, come speak into my mind. Strengthen me as I falter and feel weary. May I feel strength rising up within my heart. Bring clarity into my visions and dreams. I trust that you are with me, no matter where I go, or what I decide to do. You journey with me always. Amen. Cards and notes filled with prayers of encouragement and support can be sent to: **Mr. Michael Cahoon, C/O: Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, 1615 Beverly Lane, WI 53090.**
- We give thanks and praise that **Mr. Ben Barth**, husband of Ms. Heather Wolf, granddaughter of Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge. recipient of a new heart and new lungs. Let us pray: Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting God who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either God will shield you from suffering, or God will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then. Put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations and say continually: "The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart has trusted in God and I am helped. God is not only with me but in me, and I in God.. Correspondence can be mailed to: **Mr. Ben and Mrs. Heather Barth, 223 South 11th Ave., West Bend, WI 53095.**
- We remain in prayer and support for **Mrs. Ann Cording**. Thank you, Lord, for being there for me and allowing me to cry out to you in my times of need. It is amazing to me that the Lord of the Universe would take time to listen to me and to care about what I say. God, things are happening around me right now that I do not understand. Some of these things make me feel weak, helpless, and afraid. Even in this, I know that you are Lord. I know the situation is in Your hands, and I trust You. I beseech you for strength and wisdom that I would be able to endure this situation and handle it in a way that would bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: **Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: **Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095.**

*We celebrate and give thanks as FAUMC enters its 176th year of service,
Commitment, and Methodism in West Bend, Wisconsin.*

"Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Anticipating Our Future"

Let us pray: Jesus we come to You. We find rest in You. We need You. We need the pardon You give for our sin; we need the forgiveness You provide for our sin and we need You to help us walk with God. To obey God, to experience the delight of obedience to His commands. God, we need Your help through Christ to live this Christian life. We cannot do it on our own today. We couldn't do it yesterday, we can't do it tomorrow, we can't do it today. Please help us, we pray. Help us in such a way that we find rest for our souls as we abide in Jesus, as we walk in the yoke with Jesus, as we learn what it means to follow Jesus, we pray that our souls will grow into greater and greater rest with You. Enjoyment of You, delight in You because of the work of Christ in us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Your humble Pastor-servant leaders,

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin