

March 4, 2018

## ***"Consider it pure joy..."***

***"...the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell...no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be!"***

James 3:1-12

Growing up we used to chant, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me", whenever someone had, in fact, hurt us with words. The simple truth is that all of us have been hurt, and hurt badly, by the words of others. We cannot escape both being hurt by the words of others and hurting others by our words. Words can be a dangerous weapon and, amazingly, a great solace.

For those of us who profess to follow Jesus our words can, and too often do, make us out to be hypocrites. At one moment we talk about God's great love and the grace poured out on us in Jesus Christ and in another moment we are condemning others, and we use the same mouth to do both.

Perhaps more than any other single activity, our words show us up for who we really are. Our Lord teaches us that, ***"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."*** (Luke 6:45) Our words reflect the truth about who we are to the world and you and I are fully accountable to God for each and every word we use.

This discussion about our use of words is not, of course, limited to our verbal communication. In our world there are many, many ways to "speak" and every word we use, be it directly and verbally, or via Facebook, email or through texting, is out there and we are accountable for everything those words do. I frankly find that a scary thought.

It is so easy to use a word of condemnation isn't it? It is so easy to strike out, to hurt, to share a negative message, to gossip, and/or to damage and even destroy relationships with our words. And we must understand this, when we have sent our words out into the world we can never get them back. There is no way for me to unsay something that I have said. There is no way for me to control where my words go and what they do after I have released them either. Once I let my words go they literally take on a 'life' of their own.

And so, James warns us that our ***"...tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell..."*** This being true, how can we even begin to gain control over our words?

The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do.

—James 3:5 (TLB)



Actually, James has already shown us the way. He wrote earlier in this letter, ***"...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry..."*** First, we need to train ourselves to listen. As we noted before, we are all lousy listeners. We seldom hear or read every word in any message. We hear or read just enough to let us believe we know what is being discussed and then off we go, creating some kind of

response. In doing this we not only miss the message, we miss the opportunity of improving our understanding of the person with whom we are communicating.

So, to begin with we must learn to listen and listen well. Then, we must learn to hold our words back and to think about them carefully before we release them. Not every thought that comes into our mind should ever be allowed to escape our mouth. A lot if not most of what we could say, should never be said. Not at all. We should learn to weigh the effects of our words, and the price we might be required to pay for them.

Finally, we need to control our anger. Words generated in rage are never good, never worth saying, and yet all of us get angry and all of us spew evil words in our anger. Our anger "***...does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.***"

So, if we want to be honest about who we are in relationship to our God and Father, all we really need do is weigh our words. Our words tell the world who we really are.