

Trinity 15. 2021.

**James 3:1-12**

**Taming the Tongue**

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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! <sup>6</sup> 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,<sup>[b]</sup> and is itself set on fire by hell.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup> For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, <sup>8</sup> but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters,<sup>[d]</sup> this ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[e]</sup> yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

**Mark 8:27-end**

**Peter's Declaration about Jesus**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' <sup>28</sup> And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' <sup>29</sup> He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.'<sup>[h]</sup> <sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

**Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,<sup>[i]</sup> will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words<sup>[j]</sup> in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

**Collect**

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

*(or)*

Lord God, defend your Church from all false teaching and give to your people knowledge of your truth, that we may enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Post Communion**

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy; and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall, keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Sunday 12 September Sermon Revd David Treharne - The Power of the Tongue.**

Before I speak about speaking...

### **At a junction in our life together**

Next month we have are having a leadership day in the Parish... the second of 2 days to think about where we are going as a parish and how we will get there. The first day took place in March 2020, just before lockdown! So much has shifted since then in our world and in our parish.

If we are all passengers, or better still crew mates, on a voyage together... and most of us are gathered in the nave... (derived from the Latin for ship) we need to know what our mission is, where we are heading and how we're going to get there. Some crew have disembarked in recent times and new crew have come aboard. We have faced monumental waves buffeting the boat and much challenge and change.

As we emerge from the Covid storm and changes with people and life we at a point of need to re-evaluate who we are as God's people in this amazing part of the world, where we are going, how we will get there; refresh our vision and purpose and our part to play in the journey here. I think there is a lot be excited about just now. There is a real sense that God is at work, and we will see some wonderful things happen!

Therefore, please pray about our next steps as a church and pray about your part in the church here, and also pray how we all might better love and serve God day to day wherever God has placed us and support one another living out our faith as God's people Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday. It's an important junction in our journey together. Let's have our ears turned heavenward and earthward and discern what the Spirit may be saying.

### **Sermon begins...**

This week Kathy and I will be celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> Wedding anniversary. We got married 4 days after the events of the infamous 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. It was a very strange time... of upheaval, uncertainty and anxiety. Friends from the US were able to travel, we weren't sure if we could go on honeymoon and there was an eery sense of unknowing.

We have ample evidence around us, not least from the events of 9/11, to verify James' assertion that words have the potential to be lethal. Just a small word, a throw away comment let loose can cause devastation like one little spark causing a forest fire. On a global level, a diplomatic blunder with words can cause chaos. On a personal level a life can be turned upside down by just a few words. We grow up with the phrase 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,' but that just isn't true. Social media posts show that...!

We should not underestimate the power of words, the power of the words of others in the public domain, the power of our words said to ourselves and one another... they have the power "to set free or to bind, to unite or divide, (to bring laughter and tears,) to reveal truth or obscure truth" (Andrew Braddock). With the same tongue we can bless and curse, hurt and heal, speak lies and hate and speak truth and love. Look at Peter in the gospel... in one sentence he is inspired by the Holy Spirit to declare the Jesus is the Messiah (Mark 8:29). In more or less the next sentence his speech is inspired by Satan (Mark 8:33)!

In my marriage I say words of love that bless so it can feel like our wedding day all over again! But then I'll say words that hurt and spoil and seem incongruent to those marriage vows I uttered 20 years ago!

In the scriptures we see that God speaks in order to create: "'let there be...'" . In the Gospels Jesus' words heal, free, reconcile, challenge and forgive: 'My daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace'; 'Lazarus, come out'; 'Father, forgive them'.

His words create something good... we see light, life, hope and community created in the person of Jesus, the Living Word.

We can create too! With our words we name the world, one another, and ourselves, and our naming can create genuine realities. With our words we too can create... hope and community and friendship. We can also destroy it!

*"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."* Proverbs 18:21

*"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare."* Proverbs 15:1

*"Kind words are good medicine, but deceitful words can really hurt."* Proverbs 15:4

*"Evil words destroys one's friends."* Proverbs 11:9

*"Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."* Proverbs 16:24

*"A person's words can be life-giving water."* Proverbs 18:4

James points out that there is great responsibility for those in leadership, those who teach (James 3:1). Wise words in leadership can help inspire, encourage and comfort societies and communities, students, employees and volunteers... and create a culture of hope, compassion, aspiration and learning. In our churches words from the pulpit can create a place where people connect with God and the things of God... or not!

I know that I have made many mistakes with words in life and in ministry (James 3:2). I'm sorry!

I know that my words have the potential to create a good world in the Parish, or not... and create a good world in the Treharne household or not. In this week of wedding anniversary number 20, James is causing me to reflect hard on how I speak to Kathy. Deep down we know a kind or thoughtful or encouraging word doesn't cost much and can be such a boost, but so slowly given. I love the famous Mark Twain quote, "I can live for two months on a good compliment."

I don't know who said this... *"The tongue has no bones but is strong enough to break a heart. So be careful with your words."*

Actions do speak louder than words, but actions are motivated by words, and words are motivated by actions. Jesus reminds us that what comes out of here (our mouths) comes from within us (Matthew 15:18). As speakers and hearers that's worthy of significant reflection.

Kathy and I watched a programme recently (Joseph of Egypt) where a father (Jacob) speaks angrily to his son (Simeon) and tells him he doesn't love him, never wants to see him again... "get out of my sight." After calming down, he says to his son, "I do love you... that was my anger speaking." I wonder how many times it is our anger speaking, or our insecurity, or our fear, frustration, jealousy or impatience?

James talks about taming the tongue, but sometimes that can only come when we recognise there are deeper issues within that should be addressed.

One anonymous quote I found says *"talk with your mind before you talk with your tongue."*

Samuel Johnson said, *"Never trust your tongue when your heart is bitter."*

Nicki Gumbel said *"The words of the tongue should have 3 gatekeepers: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?"*

God working within us by his Holy Spirit... to heal and renew our hearts and minds, can help our speech. Taking steps to put good things into our 2 ears and 2 eyes can help sow good things in our hearts and minds and produce good words. Taking wise counsel from friends and being accountable to others in what we say will hone our speech. As we learn to tame the tongue bringing it under the reign of God, and as we practice the virtue of self-control we will learn when to be silent and when to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7), and those words will hopefully honour God, and bring dignity, life and joy to others and ourselves.