**James 3:1-12 (ESV)**

**1**  Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2** For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. **4** Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. **7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

**“A Word of Service”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In this age of communication, people are able to say pretty much whatever they want. Cell phones, social media, email, and other devices have opened the door to limitless conversation. Such an environment makes the art of diplomacy very hard today in the world. Sadly, those American representatives killed in Libya did not incite the violent protests. That came from the other side of the world with news about release of an anti-Muhammad movie. If there has ever been a time when words matter, it is today in the times we live. Technology has taken what we say to the doorstep of every culture and people in this world.

Yet, we need not look at the global situation to see the danger. The age of communication has only made the world into a small community. In the rural setting, you already know how fast word gets around about an issue or person. Long before Facebook or texting there has been plenty of chitchat over coffee, in the fields, and among families. As much as it draws closeness between people, this also comes at the price of much gossip that injures our neighbor. The church as a close-knit community of the baptized faces a similar threat with abusing God’s Word. This is why the apostle James points out, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Our mouths are to meet the mouth of Jesus for He speaks to save sinners.

For all the similarities there are with human beings and animals. God made the distinguishing mark between man and beast by words. Adam and Eve could speak to each other just as God spoke directly to them. Of course, the fall into sin polluted the mouth of humanity. The quacking of ducks, tweeting of birds, or barking of dogs does not stand against God. It is the word of what man speaks. St. James states, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.” It is as Jesus said against the argument broken out over the demon-possessed boy, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”

The pollution of our mouth is more deadly than what we see in life. Can you conceive of what you say in a day? Are we able to weigh every word? Most of the times, it is the words we are least thinking about that does the most damage. Consider what the early church father Basil the Great says,

“Do we need to recall the many names which are given to the sins of the tongue? For from it comes slanders, coarse jokes, idiocies, irrelevant accusations, bitterness, swearing, false witness—the tongue is the creator of all these evil things and more” (ACC 39).

It is as I teach in marriage counseling. If the “D” word is already being used the damage is done. Lord knows long before any divorce there is plenty of pollution coming out of the mouth. Maybe it is not that drastic, but what we say betrays us time again. The accusation is clear, “,but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Not even mom with her bar of soap in the mouth can clean out the sinful heart that speaks against God and my neighbor.

As dangerous as the mouth is, God chooses to save humanity by speaking salvation out of the of one man. The Word become flesh in Jesus Christ is a righteousness pleasing to the Father and good for sinners. As Isaiah revealed about this Savior, “The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.” It is by the cross where God promises with His mouth that all things are possible against sin, death, and the Devil. The perfect Son of God speaks salvation to sinners that speak against Him. His suffering and death is a Word of forgiveness for a world polluted with sinful words. As Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” John 8:28 (ESV)

All are in need of Christ, since we live in a world where the words of men grow weary. The apostle James proclaimed, “For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.” If words run wild today so that no one believes what anyone else says, then we still have hope in Jesus. He alone bridles the Church in salvation and forgiveness resting on His Word. He is the perfect man who alone cries out to the Father for us poor sinners. It is to Him we prayed this morning saying, “Lord Jesus Christ, our support and defense in every need, continue to preserve Your Church in safety, govern her by Your goodness, and bless her with Your peace…” His perfect mouth does not spit out poison, but calls sinners to life as promised by the cross. It is as Isaiah said, “Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

The polluted mouth that meets the perfect man Jesus receives purified lips. If baptism is how God extinguishes the fiery words of sinners by water, then the Word also gives His saints something to say. This Word does not come from our heart or mind but originates as a gift spoken by God for the baptized. It is as we begin in the service of Matins, “Oh Lord open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.” Where words seem trivial today compared to action. This is not so with Jesus, whose Word forgives and is at work in the lives of His saints. Luther comments in the Large Catechism, “There is nothing about a man or in a man that can do greater good or greater harm, in spiritual or in temporal matters, than this smallest and weakest of his members, the tongue” (Tappert 404:291). Rather than silencing us, Jesus entrusts us with words that would glorify Him and be a benefit for our neighbor.

If there is fear to speak because of what we end up saying as sinners, take heart. Jesus gives His true body and blood to touch our sinful lips with holiness He alone gives. All the “he said, she said” lines, all the damage spoken, all the rumors spread are to hear those words given and shed for you. Jesus goes to the source of the problem so that our mouths can feast on His sacrifice. You might be surprised with what seems so small for this Word given in the sacrament is able to renew, strengthen and guide us. Since the way God communicates comes by the cross, He cuts through the chatter of a sinful world that has nothing good to say. Our mouths are to meet the mouth of Jesus for He speaks to save sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.