

Children's sermon (toothbrush)

(I love) the book of James! He is so practical, so relevant, so intentional about what it means to be Christian, and what it means to live in community. Some of his words can bring a chuckle to our hearts, and some can be deep and powerful challenges. Those words are enough to cause us to roll our eyes and sigh audibly.

(Tame) your tongue. I believe James was flatly addressing the gossips in his congregation. I believe he was responding to the many brushfires in that little community in Jerusalem caused by (talking) out of turn, talking without authority, talking to shadow the image or reputation of another community member....whom you have to know...they did not like.

Tame your tongue, James commands. Well, in this (day of) facebook, instagram, and texts and tweets James' words need to be magnified, and proclaimed loudly...tame your tongue!!! Why?

Well, whenever you speak a word....(it is) loose in the world, and you no longer have any control over it. The tenet "what you post online is there forever" is pretty much.....true. (High) School and middle school teachers are now warning their students not to post certain images, or words because years from now a potential employer will be able to do a Google search on you and guess what shows up? (That) curse-laden rant, or that flattering- selfie you took on vacation....and boom, interview over. Once you post your message, you no longer have control of your words.

I wonder what James (would) have said about Twitter? (Tame) your thumbs? And, I have to wonder what James (would) say about the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment in the U. S. Constitution! Tame your tongue! Tame your thumbs! Think before you speak!!!

(BUT), and there's always a But....free speech is a daily reality in this land. And it has become more holy, more worshipped.... than any mention of God's mercy and grace. (I can) say whatever I want....it is my freedom of speech!

(And that) is exactly why James addresses this very dynamic reality as vulnerable people seek a community where grace is spoken, but where mercy is incarnate! (You can) say we have grace, grace, grace...but if the hearts of the people are slow to forgive, and are slow to love....then all that grace talk.... doesn't mean a thing.

In my years as a pastor I (regularly) experience the results of people who have not learned to tame their tongues....when these four words begin the sentence...."I heard that you ....." True. (And a) solid 90% of the time, what they heard was not true! Rather, a facet of truth was remodeled into a less than flattering lie. Unfortunately, the motivation of the gossip is intended to.... What? (To give) the liar a sense of power, or influence.

It is still true....and because it is... (James') words are among the most practical means to establish a community that is committed to unity, for the sake of Christ.

When New Spirit was (created,) we self-identified as a Covenant Community. We said we wanted to be a different kind of church. We said we wanted to avoid the pitfalls that the Book of James talks about. All of us on the transition-team had experienced (the pain) and suffering inflicted by the lies uttered by certain people, or groups of people. So, we decided to shine a light on it. If you have an issue with someone, speak directly to them.....and (don't spin) your story among your friends and acquaintances. And if someone shares that bit of spun gossip respond with "Have you spoken to that person? We don't do that here at New Spirit. We have promised that with one another." For the most part, it has worked. But, there continue to be some untamed tongues. It happens.

I believe that at the core of the division that has infected the world is the (ego.) No matter where you sit in the scheme of things, none of us has a clear understanding of the whole. We don't. Those things we do not know, our ignorance, would wisely be acknowledged. This I do not know. Help me to know it. That would be a wise thing to say.

When we deny our ignorance....(our ego) shifts into overdrive... and "I" becomes the voice of authority. That tragedy is written throughout all of history. A thousand years before Jesus, the writer of Proverbs offered this little gem of (truth.) "It is better for you to be silent and make people think you are a fool, than it is to open your mouth and prove it."

A perfect example of that was heard in the Gospel I read a few minutes ago. (Jesus) tells his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem where he will be arrested, and beaten by the priests, scribes, and elders, and there he will die, and rise again on the third day.

(Peter,) the petulant fisherman of Gallilee.....opens his mouth with a cynical whisper: What? No, Lord, let's just do it the easy way. No cost. No struggle. No discomfort. We've got a good thing here Jesus!

Oh, Peter, Peter, Peter..... you need to tame your tongue, buddy. Of course, we'll see him again shortly.....during the time Jesus was on trial for his life.....denying even knowing Jesus....completely. You need to tame your tongue, buddy!

Do you think that was a problem for Peter? So, in this (day of) narrowing world views, and the proliferation of social media where righteous indignation is shared in all capital letters...how can the ideals of unity survive?

(God) only knows. That's right! God knows....and to assist our fragile egos, our vulnerable hearts, and our deep hunger for acceptance and belonging God has given us a far better way.

And that way is modeled in Jesus of Nazareth. That way is recorded in the Gospels, in the letters of Peter, Paul, and James. This way is based in God's willingness to love us, and even more, God's willingness to forgive us. (Jesus) welcomed everyone. Jesus mercied every broken, blind, and scarred person. That mercy, that forgiveness lifted the vulnerable to become the beloved.

(How) can communities of vulnerable, hurt, and hopeful people arise to be a community of the beloved? Let's start with this discipline: (tame) your tongue, watch your speech, be careful what you say and how you say it. Let that be your 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment discipline.....for sake of love, and for the love of God. Amen.

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