

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'Brothers, sisters, those who have it together, those who are ragged at the edges, those who are perfect, those who feel a bit chipped, those who know when to stay quiet, those whose tongues run away with them, know that all are welcome. God's delight is that you are here in this space and time. Come, as we worship together'

Hymn CH4 127 – O worship the King,

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Holy One, no words can describe you fully, each word is but a tiny candle light, together they build up into a candelabra beaming its light upon you but never fully capturing you.

Each generation creates new words for you, trying to understand you more fully, trying to help others understand you, and drawing them nearer to you. All creations speaks of your glory, sunrises and sunsets, beginning and ending each day, moonlight dancing on the oceans, as the world sleeps.

You speak to us in the gentle breeze and howling gales, in the gushing river waterfalls and the rain pounding off our windows, in the early morning bird song and evening hum of crickets, in the laughter of children and the babbling of infants, and in so many other ways, if only we would listen. Your sacred written word still speaks to us, in new and varying ways, reminding us of the truth it holds for us about your never-ending love for all creation and your desire for a relationship with all of it.

Forgive us, Lord God, for despite the wonderful senses you have given us, we still too often fail to use them and therefore miss so much of what you want to tell us. Forgive us too when we use words to shame or hurt another part of your creation, remind us that you love it all and desire us to love it too.

Help us to be better listeners and to use our words simply and gently, building up the body of Christ and his kingdom, here and now.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Reading: James 3: 1– 12

My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers. As you know, we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others. All of us often make mistakes. But if a person never makes a mistake in what he says, he is perfect and is also able to control his whole being. We put a bit into the mouth of a horse to make it obey us, and we are able to make it go where we want. Or think of a ship: big as it is and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and it goes wherever the pilot wants it to go.

So it is with the tongue: small as it is, it can boast about great things.

Just think how large a forest can be set on fire by a tiny flame! And the tongue is like a fire. It is a world of wrong, occupying its place in our bodies and spreading evil through our whole being. It sets on fire the entire course of our existence with the fire that comes to it from hell itself. Human beings can tame and have tamed all other creatures — wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

But no one has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison. We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people, who are created in the likeness of God. Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, this should not happen! No spring of water pours out sweet water and bitter water from the same opening. A fig tree, my brothers and sisters, cannot

bear olives; a grapevine cannot bear figs, nor can a salty spring produce sweet water.

All Age Talk

Hymn CH4 606 – Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders

Sermon – ‘What about Words?’

What do you think is the most powerful part of the human body? Chiselled Abdominals? Powerful legs? Amazing Brain? Those bits of our body are amazing, but James tells us today that there is an even more powerful part than that – our tongues. The human tongue accounts for under 1% of our body mass but punches well above its weight. Why, well, we use our tongues to speak, and our words can have huge effects. Our words can be a powerful force for good or for ill.

In today’s reading, James compares our tongues to some other small objects that can have a disproportionate effect. In verse 3 he writes: *“We put a bit into the mouth of a horse to make it obey us, and we are able to make it go where we want.”* A little piece of metal can make a huge horse change direction. In verse 4: *“think of a ship: big as it is and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and it goes wherever the pilot wants it to go.”* A small rudder can determine whether a whole ship stays afloat or crashes into the rocks! In verse 5, James tells us that just a *“tiny flame”*, can set a whole forest on fire. A small cigarette or a match can create an inferno.

You see, small things can have big effects – including our tongues.

Whenever we open our mouths to speak – which is something we do on average 700 times a day – we are wielding a powerful force. Good words can lift our spirits, they encourage us, inform us, and inspire us. However, bad words can break a heart, sow division, or drive us to despair. Friendships and careers, marriages and churches can all be damaged by bad words. Wrong words can be destructive.

So, James decides to write about this in his instruction manual: people who use their tongue to teach have a particular responsibility. We will be strictly judged for what we say. Teachers in schools, pastors of churches and parents of children have a huge responsibility to use our words well: School teachers and parents have the power to shape the lives of children with their words. Preachers and pastors have the huge responsibility of telling people about Jesus and explaining the Bible to them. However, whether we are teachers or not, our words must always be chosen very carefully. They can have a huge effect on others – both for good and for bad.

Now, I expect we all know the popular saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Yet, the trouble is, that’s not true – is it? Wrong words can be incredibly harmful, incredibly hurtful. We’ve all been hurt at some time by critical comments, harsh words, bullying and bad language. So, James says our unruly tongues need to be tamed – just like we tame animals to be pets. James writes in verse 7: *“Human beings can tame and have tamed all other creatures — wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish.”*

Our tongues need to be brought under control. We need to make sure we say the right thing at the right time. As James writes in verse 10: *“We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people, who are created in the likeness of God. Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, this should not happen!”* James’ instruction manual is in essence telling us that we should be consistently careful and wise in what we say.

Yet it’s incredibly hard, isn’t it? We have all said wrong things sometimes, and we find it hard to keep our tongue under control. In fact, James says it’s impossible for us to tame our tongue, doesn’t he? On our own we can’t always say what’s right, we don’t have the power to be perfect. Verse 2 says we’re all *“at fault”* for some of the things we’ve said.

For human beings can tame roaring lions and birds of prey, but we can’t control our own tongues. Why? Why is it so impossible? Well, to change our *words*, we need a change of *heart*.

This is the point that James is making in verses 11 and 12. He writes: *“No spring of water pours out sweet water and bitter water from the same opening. A fig tree, my brothers and sisters, cannot bear olives; a grapevine cannot bear figs, nor can a salty spring produce sweet water.”* What James is saying is that a plant produces its own fruit. A grape vine produces grapes, and a fig tree produces figs. You don’t see oranges on an apple tree, or plums on a pear tree. And elsewhere in nature, a salt spring can only spurt out salt water – it can’t produce pure water.

In the same way, our words are the ‘fruit’ from our heart – they ‘spring’ out from our soul. If we find ourselves speaking bad words, it shows that there is something wrong with our heart. To tame our tongues, we need a new heart.

Jesus himself taught this, just as James does. In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus says these words: *“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”*

There’s only one person who can perform the ‘heart surgery’ every human needs. And that person is the Holy Spirit. Whenever someone becomes a Christian and first puts their faith in Jesus, God’s Spirit enters their heart and begins to change it. It’s what Jesus famously called being ‘born again’.

When God’s Spirit gets to work on our hearts, our words will change as a result – as our heart is transformed by God, so too our tongue will be tamed. In fact, some of the most visible ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in our lives will be a change in how and what we say. If we are eager to grow as disciples of Jesus (as I hope, we all are) we should be eager and impatient to see improvements in our speech – as God’s Spirit gets to work.

So, before I finish, how do we use our tongues well? What does good and godly speech look like? How can we serve Jesus with our lips as well as our lives?

Firstly, our tongues should be used to praise God. In verse 9, James tells us that when we *“praise our Lord and Father”* we are putting our tongues to very good

use. Our first duty as Christians is to worship the Lord who has made us and saved us. We can praise him in prayer and sing songs to God in gratitude for all he's given us.

Secondly, we should use our lips to encourage our fellow Christians. The New Testament letter of Hebrews tells us to "*spur one another on towards love and good deeds*", while Colossians calls on Christians to "*teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.*" So, I hope that when we are together, we don't grumble or gossip, criticize or condemn, but try to encourage one another.

Thirdly and finally, we should use our tongues to share the Gospel. Do we ever talk about Jesus during the week or is He only for Sundays?

During the next seven days may we know when to use our words and when to remain silent.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn CH4 97 – O God, you search me and you know me.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our bodies bring glory and praise to you O Lord. You have given us everything and now we offer our gifts of money to be used to build your kingdom. May they be a sign that we want to dedicate our very selves to you and may we use our words and actions to help to bring your kingdom here and now.

O God, you search us and you know us, we are frail and simple beings, often foolish and forgetful. We thank you for the gift gifts of wisdom and truth, made known to us through your word.

We bring our words, for ourselves and for our world, near and far.

We thank you for your written word, and for all who helped write and translate and commentate upon it, for all who read it and all who preach from it.

We pray for the people who try to live daily by your word, for all who live out its life-giving call to serve in love, caring for self and neighbour.

We pray for all the people who seek your word, in scripture, religion and nature, may they be blessed in their search and come to know you more fully.

We pray for people who find words are used like weapons against them, who have wounds from years of listening to hateful, abusive language used to hurt and isolate them.

Lord in your mercy, may they hear your loving word today. Lord, may our words speak lovingly and wisely always. Amen.

Hymn CH4 622 – We sing a love that sets all people free.

Benediction

May the Word of Life breathe love into all you say. Speak well and speak wisely, console and speak kindly. Speak truth to power. Leave space for others to speak. So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.