**September 12, 2021 James 3:1-12**

***A Story Too God to Keep Quiet***

**Scripture:**

*(1)Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (2)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. (3)If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. (4)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. (5)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! (6)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, and is itself set on fire by hell. (7)For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, (8)but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9)With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. (10)From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. (11)Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? (12)Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. James 3:1-12 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. Watch your ***mouth***!
   1. The words we say in haste are some of the most ***hurtful***.
   2. Be careful with the words you ***choose*** and speak.
2. Our tongue is not used ***enough***!
   1. People do not feel ***competent*** in sharing their faith.
   2. People do not want to get the story ***wrong***.
   3. Culture says religion is a ***private*** matter,
3. Friends don’t let friends ***live*** without Jesus.
   1. ***Salvation*** is a here-and-now experience.
   2. Those ***active*** in worship are more family oriented.
   3. The best outlet for ***meaningful*** ***service*** is in the church.
4. How do unchurched ***friends*** learn these benefits?
   1. Some ***tongue*** has to tell them.
   2. Be yourself, and ***invite***.
   3. Many of those not currently ***attending*** church, were active members in some church in the past,
5. If you invite your friends, they might actually ***come***.
   1. This is what the church needs to ***grow***.
   2. Be careful to ***include*** others.
   3. Do your friends ***know*** where you go to ***church***?
6. Christian discipleship says we need to put that ***tongue*** in ***motion*** in the right ways.
   1. Do not get ***discouraged***!
   2. Share your ***invitations***.
   3. Share with others ***your*** ***story***, a story too good to keep quiet.

**Script:**

Don’t our mouths get us into trouble? More often than not, it is my poor choice of words in an attempt to express myself that causes me grief. I say something with one thought in mind and it is received by another person with a different perception of what was meant. Just the other day somebody asked me a question and I replied with a comment that was meant to be nonchalant, however, after the fact I was told that my choice of words sounded rude. Rudeness was not my intent, but after being told, I could see where my words could have been perceived differently.

Have you ever used words that were misconceived? Did you ever say something with one thing in mind, and find out afterwards that your message was seen as offensive or rude? Our humor is not always appreciated, nor is it always desired. However, what we say and how we say it is of the utmost importance. Today we will be looking at two passages, the first to express the necessity to choose our words correctly. It is found in James 3:1-12. Let’s begin and would you join me in the reading of this passage today.

*(1)Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (2)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. (3)If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. (4)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. (5)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! (6)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, and is itself set on fire by hell. (7)For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, (8)but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9)With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. (10)From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. (11)Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? (12)Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. James 3:1-12 NRSV*

WATCH YOUR MOUTH! What a lesson. I want to give you a quick quiz this morning. Guess my name? I am more deadly than the screaming shell of the cannon. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. Who am I? My name is ***gossip***.As I prepared this week, I remembered a story that I had heard many years ago. A pastor comes to church one snowy Sunday morning to find that only one member of the congregation had been able to make it to the worship service that morning. As it happens, the text and sermon for the day came from this third chapter of James and focused on the damage done by gossiping. It also turned out that, of all the people in the congregation, this one person was more guilty of this particular sin than anybody! So, with one-person congregation or not, the pastor proceeded as if it were a full house for twenty solid minutes, the word thundered from the pulpit about the dangers of a loose tongue. After the service, the parishioner prepared to depart and was complimentary with their remarks: “Marvelous sermon, Pastor. It’s such a shame that those who needed to hear it were not here.”

Aren’t the words we say in haste and the words we share in gossip some of the most hurtful? “It isn’t the things that go in one ear and out the other that hurt as much as the things that go in one ear, get all mixed up, and then slip out the mouth.Is there anyone here who has not heard that? Anybody here not know that? This is “common sense” stuff. I have no intention of going on any further in this direction. We are all aware of the damage to be done and the danger to be avoided from the words of a much too talkative tongue. Be careful with the words you choose and speak. Enough said.

Actually, something else SHOULD be said. In the context of our life together as the church, there is another danger that exists in regards to our tongue. It is not used enough! Take a look at our gospel passage for today in Mark 8: *(27)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?" (28)And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." (29)He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." Mark 8:27-29 NRSV*

Good answer Peter. The fact is, most church members these days would be just as happy to stand quietly still in response to the question let Peter answer, he is one of Jesus top three disciples; let somebody else answer. Not that those others don’t know the answer; they are just a bit reluctant to talk about Jesus or God or anything “churchy” outside the context of church. The tongues that can be so dangerously talkative at one moment fall strangely silent the next. Why? Why are they silent, why are they reluctant to talk about Jesus, or God, or church? Do they not care? The answer is No; people do care, but they have heard that part of the Christian calling is to witness to our faith, and well, most folks, in my opinion, are just plain scared. Even though there might not be much evidence, they do want to share with others about Christ and the change in their life, but they are afraid to do it. They do not feel comfortable sharing their faith because they do not feel COMPETENT in sharing their faith. They do not want to get the story WRONG. On top of that, our culture says that religion is a private matter, separation of church and state; and all that kind of stuff; so we all have a wonderful excuse to just keep quiet about it. That should not to be so.

Do you remember a few years back the “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk” campaign? Well, somebody came up with a paraphrased bumper sticker that states that, “Friends Don’t Let Friends Die Without Jesus.” That is great and I will agree with it. But I think that it would be better stated if it read “Friends Don’t Let Friends LIVE Without Jesus.” Or without the church. Or without the friendship and fellowship that comes with being an active member of a caring congregation. Or something like that.

The concern about friends dying without Jesus betrays a belief that salvation is unfeasible. Not so. A truly Biblical understanding insists that salvation is a here-and-now experience, and is best found in the life of the local church. Want proof? Listen to these numbers. The Gallup organization reports that frequent churchgoers are 48 percentage points more likely to rate themselves as “very happy” than those who attend erratically or not at all. An article in Emerging Trends says: people who are active in worship are more family oriented, less often divorced, three times more generous, less likely to participate in alcohol or drug abuse, give considerably more time to civic causes and contribute more substantially to social values than do those who do not worship.

I’ve heard many times, the Baby Boomers and the Generation-X’ers desire to find opportunities for meaningful service. Where do we find the best outlet for that need? The church. Another study, Giving and Volunteering in the United States, shows that people who are members of congregations are far more likely to be generous with both time and money to a wide variety of non-profit activities. Gallup’s studies indicate that almost half of church members did unpaid volunteer work in the past year compared with only a third of the unchurched population; nine out of ten church members gave money to a charity, while only seven of ten non-members gave.

And what about teenagers? Someone has said that the average teen gets more temptation to sin on the way to school in the morning than his grandfather got on Saturday night when he was out looking for it. The teen years are tough. Gallup says that of the 76% of teens who said they were members of religious congregations, 62% were also volunteers, and 56% made charitable contributions. By contrast, those who had no church affiliation volunteered only 44% of the time, and only 25% gave to worthy causes.

Who would you prefer to be in charge of our nation in the future? Who would you rather be in charge of and managing my Social Security and Medicare? I would prefer to take my chances with the ones IN church, more so than those on the outside, wouldn’t you? So how do our unchurched friends learn all those benefits? And if you are worried that you do not know anyone who is not already a part of a church, the truth is, if you are anything like the rest of America, approximately HALF your friends have not been to church within the past six months except for a wedding or a funeral, a Christmas or an Easter that makes them “unchurched.” They might have their name on a roll somewhere – even HERE – but if they do not attend, they are unchurched.) How do we get those unchurched friends of ours “churched?”

Some TONGUE has to tell them. How about yours? How do you go about it? Just invite. Simple. No deep religious discourse necessary. You do not need any formula, no Four Spiritual Laws, no Two Questions, We don’t need to do it the way the TV folks do it. Just be yourself, and invite, and the more specific the invitation, the better. Invite them to some particular event or activity, Even if they are not able to accept your invitation to THIS event, try again for another. If they want to talk about spiritual things, fine share your story…how you came to faith, how you came to this church, what it has meant in important moments in your life. That is the story worth sharing. And all the studies indicate that your friends will appreciate your interest in them.

We live in perhaps the most religious nation in the technically-advanced world. 95% of us say we believe in a God or Supreme Being. 80% say we pray regularly. 40% say we were at worship in the past week. Many of those not currently attending anywhere were active members in some church in the past, and three out of five say they would respond positively to an invitation. When is the last time you invited someone to come to church with you? When is the last time you invited FIVE? THREE might come! When was the last time you invited TEN? Six may come! Get that tongue going.

Now, one thing to be wary of – if you invite your friends, as the statistics indicate, they might actually come. And if they come once, they might want to come again. And again and again and again. They might even want to join. Even more so as they bring THEIR friends…and then THEIR friends bring friends. Do you see where this is going; this is what the church needs to grow. And the more growth, the better.

That kind of growth will change this place. Suddenly we will be different and for us to presume that everyone would be happy about that is naïve. I like to believe we are a loving congregation, and that is wonderful – we are FAMILY. We may not be perfect, by any means; But when Christians gather, everything that can go wrong, sooner or later does. That is SAINT Murphy’s Law. Believe it or not, there is a danger with a “loving congregation” the “family” circle of love can be so strong that outsiders cannot get in. We have to be careful not to shut people out. We need to be careful to include people who are new to us. A man named Roy Lloyd, interviewed the late Mother Teresa a few times over the years her answer to one of his questions jumps out in this context. He asked her, “What’s the biggest problem in the world today?” She answered, without hesitation, “The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small. We need to draw it larger every day.”

This week I read of a church that had a picture gallery with photographs of many of the members. The Pastor said, “I don’t know how many times at a wedding or some other function in the building that someone has looked at the pictures and stated, ‘I didn’t know they went to this church.’ Why didn’t they know?”he asks. You know as well as I do. Do YOUR friends know where you go to church? I think the point has been made. James says watch your tongue. Be careful about what you say. And Christian discipleship says we do need to put that tongue in motion in the right ways. It will require some thought, some preparation, and surely some prayer as you ask for God’s guidance in opening doors for your invitations.

One final bit of advice: DO NOT GET DISCOURAGED! In the words of the Apostle Paul, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9* Share your invitations to those who are most precious to you. Share your invitations to those who are your neighbors. Share your invitations to those who you are friends with. Share your invitations to those who you meet and are able to have a conversation. And after inviting all of these people, if they ask you about your spiritual walk; Share with them how you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Share with them how you came to attend this church. Share with them why you invited them to join us here. Share with others your story. This is, after all, is a story too good to keep quiet.

We all have a story that is unique only to you. We spend so much of our lives hiding our true identities, so that we are not able to be hurt, so that we are not able to be criticized, so we are not able to be embarrassed. But what if we were able to make a difference in somebody else’s life for the better? What if we are able to help our friends come to know Jesus? What if we are able to help them lead others to Jesus as well? We can, if we will just share with those around us.