



The Church's prayer for Sunday 12th September

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.

Bible Readings and Reflection for Sunday 12th September

A reading from James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

A Gospel reading from Mark 8:27-end

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.



³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

A reflection from Revd Chris Westgarth, Curate for Comberton

Words, words, words... just words...

A couple of weeks ago I had the joy of attending the Oasis Holiday Club... it was fabulous...there was lots of chatter but as we thought about trying new activities, I heard some people talking about things their teachers had said to them at school...such as at the end of lesson of woodwork, 'it's probably better if you don't come back to class next week and you tidy the library instead', 'I really don't think you have the ability to sew' and 'that's not art, it's a mess'...

These were the memories of people in their late 70's or early 80's...and yet some 60 plus years later they still could vividly remember the words and how it made them feel... Equally I remember as a 9-year-old being told I could not learn to play the violin because I had the wrong shaped fingers... for years I felt imperfect... but the truth was there was nothing wrong with my fingers - just they didn't have enough violins for the class!

Our passage in James highlights the importance of the tongue and the need to control it. James speaks of perfection and he uses the word 'perfect' 7 times in his book... it means with integrity and wholeness... isn't that how we would like our speech and our life to be? But we fall short... we miss the mark...

Sticks and stones....I am sure we know that old rhyme so well... but it is not true... words and more importantly our words have the power to build up or the devastating power to break down, to crush, to scar and to wound.

The Christian group '2nd Chapter of Acts', wrote a fabulous song called 'That's not nice to say' ... *'Words confuse or bruise, words can style or file you away, be careful what you say... Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will break my heart....chew, chew, chew, let's bite another back...*

Do we feast on critical words, hurtful, negative speech?



Our reading cautions us about the power of the tongue - *How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire!* YES words are so very powerful. We see this theme in James chapter 3 played out, but it's also a theme strung through the entire book of James. Indeed, words can do great good. We can use words of encouragement, and people's spirits will be lifted. We can pray with someone, and those words will bring life.

BUT...

There's a great Jewish story that talks about our words. 'A man had told so many malicious untruths about the local Rabbi that, overcome by remorse, he begged the Rabbi to forgive him. *'And, Rabbi, tell me how I can make amends.'* The Rabbi sighed, *'Well...take two pillows, go to the village square and cut the pillows open. Wave them in the air. Then come back to me'*. The man quickly went home, got two pillows and a knife, rushed to the village square, cut the pillows open, waved them in the air and then rushed back to the Rabbi's house. *'There, I've done it...I did just as you said, Rabbi!'* *'Well done'* The Rabbi smiled. *'Now, to learn how much harm is done by gossip, go back to the square...'* *'Ok'*, he said *'And?'* *'And collect all your feathers.'*

That's an impossible task!

If we look at the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we see the power of words. God spoke, and the world was made. That's how powerful words are. Mankind shall not live by bread alone but by every spoken word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Deut 8:3, Mt 4:4)

Words can lift up, but words can also put us down... how many of us heard the good news of Jesus through spoken words, or by someone reading the Bible to us. That is how powerful words and speech are! They can bring great life.

BUT words can also bring great destruction.

Now we might say... *'well that's ok... I don't gossip, I don't complain about others', 'I don't speak about others behind their back'* – and that may well be true... but what do we do instead, we belittle ourselves... Our inner voice wrestles with us day and night. Some of the ways we talk to ourselves are ways we would never talk to our worst enemy. We need to speak to ourselves, with the same love, and forgiveness and patience that we give others. When we let our inner voice shame us, we need to stop, and ask ourselves, would we talk to a friend like this? Then change that inner voice to encouragement, and reciting what God's word says about us.

I am a child of God, I am loved, I am forgiven, I am a new creation,

That's why it's important to memorise little portions of scripture to repeat in our minds, or out loud, when we start having negative thoughts. When we start thinking, what's the point of life, no we are born again of the Spirit. We are destined for paradise, We are holy as God is holy. We need to change that internal conversation. It is important to fill our heart with the word of God and allow the fruit of the spirit to grow, for as it says *'out of the overflow of our heart, the mouth speaks'*... We need to fine tune our communication mechanisms to



hear the voice of the Lord, the gentle whisper or the thunder roar...to know when to remain silent or when to ponder things in our heart, or when to speak out.

I have heard it said we need to learn to gossip the gospel... we need to be eager to use our voice and our words for good, for God!

I remember hearing the Bible teacher and evangelist, Alan Redpath, speak at Spring Harvest, many years ago... During a time of difficulty in his ministry, he set up a method before speaking of others or about controversial issues: he would use the word THINK...

T--Is it true?

H--Is it helpful?

I--Is it inspiring?

N--Is it necessary?

K--Is it kind?

If it didn't pass the test he would remain silent...

In conclusion we see the final section of James 3, which speaks of 'True Wisdom that comes from God.' And really that's what verses 1 to 12 are talking about, being wise with our words. We are called to live humbly, honourably, doing good deeds. It challenges us to not live in bitter jealousy, or selfish ambition, or boasting, or lying. But let's hide the word of the Lord in our heart.

What an amazing way to live, let's all aim for that... because if we don't aim, we'll never hit the target, using our words to spread goodness or the good news, faith, love and truth. May our words be seasoned with grace, integrity, love and leading to wholeness.