

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Sermon for Sunday, July 19, 2009
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness,” James wrote in last week’s Epistle. 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. “We can tame a lot of wild beasts, James wrote, but we can’t tame our own little tongue.” Our days are shaped by what comes out of our mouth...and also by what stays inside of it.

How many of our days would be different if we would say different things? If we could go back and say something a little bit differently, or not even say it at all? Or where we were silent, if we would’ve spoken up.

We always wish we could’ve said things differently. At least that’s always been the case in my life. Even when I say something right, I still would like a chance to go back and say it even *more* correctly. We also are quiet, often, when we wish we would’ve spoken up.

But once something is said, it’s said. And we can’t take it back. Once something is sent, to put it in a relative context, it’s sent and you can’t get that email back. And also, once a moment passes and you didn’t speak up, you can’t get that moment back. And the words that we say - the things that we say - and the things that we say to other people, and then also the things that we don’t say that we keep inside of us really do shape our lives. More than just about anything else.

That’s what James is kind of getting at in last week’s lesson. And the thing is, this isn’t anything profound at all. Every one of us here knows and understands that. Even the littlest children among us know that sometimes our tongues and our mouths say things that they shouldn’t and that we wish we could take back. But once it is spoken, it changes the way that we work in our lives. It changes the way that things happen. And it shapes the next step, and the next step. And we can’t get away from this. It’s in our nature, it’s been that way since the beginning, since Adam and Eve were confronted by God in the Garden.

The disciples are an example of this in today’s Gospel reading. They don’t speak when they should. They speak about things that they shouldn’t. And if anything speaks to the veracity of Scripture, the truthfulness of it, it’s that these disciples who write these things don’t write their errors out of the text! But they keep them in there and make themselves look like the bumbling idiots that they sometimes are.

Jesus is teaching His disciples in today’s text. This is the second of three Passion predictions in Mark’s Gospel that come one right after the other. The way our lectionary

is set up, this one is a little bit disjointed. The other two we talk about during Lent this year. But this one goes along with them, and it's kind of nice that we have it now here in September - that we get this taste of Lent and taste of the Cross that, in truth, we get every Sunday. But here, we get a little more clear.

Jesus is teaching the disciples about the Cross, about what is going to happen in His life. And He tells them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And when He is killed, after three days, He will rise."

This is *important* information. Important teachings that Jesus is teaching His disciples, about some important event that is going to happen to Him. In this one, the second prediction and maybe even more so in first and the third prediction, Jesus talks about how He will be handed over by the Pharisees and by the Scribes and all of these teachers of the law into the government. Here He implicates all of mankind in His death.

He will be handed over and crucified because of all of us. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. Into our hands. This is important stuff! And what do the disciples do? Do they engage Him on this topic, as they have the Son of God right there, into this confusing thing that He's teaching them? Well, no. It says that they sat there quietly. They did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask Him.

They didn't speak up at this wonderful time when they could've spoken up and said, "Jesus, what is this that you're talking about? We don't understand what you're saying. The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the hands of men and be killed and then rise in three days? What is this teaching??" Instead they're silent. They don't speak up. They don't ask Him questions. And they go on in their lives.

Which just seems unfathomable to me. Here they have Jesus with them. They know He's the Christ, they've spoken of that. They've seen Him do these wonderful miracles - they *just* saw Him cure this man who had his boy with the demon possession. When they couldn't do anything and Jesus comes down and speaks a Word and the demon departs and He says, "This kind can only be eliminated with fasting and with prayer," And they don't ask Him anything. They say, "Well, that's just Jesus teaching something so we're just going to go on in our lives."

And so they go on. And as they're going to the next place along the road, they start an argument among themselves. Roads back then weren't the same as they are now - they were a lot more narrow and you'd have to walk in single file. Perhaps that's what brought up the argument: "Who are the ones that are closest to Jesus on this road and who are the ones that are in the back, in 12th place?"

They're arguing about this, and they end up going into the house and Jesus, even though He knows what's going on, doesn't confront them about it while they're on the road or anything like that. Instead He waits. And they get into this house and He sits down with them and He brings up a casual conversation and says, "What was that that you guys were talking about?" And again, they're silent.

They know what they were talking about. And they don't want to tell Jesus. They don't want to admit that they were arguing about who is the greatest one among them. This, right after Jesus was teaching them about His own death. And the thing that they choose to discuss on the road is not what Jesus is talking about with His death and His life and this resurrection. But instead, which one of them is the greatest. So they stay there silently.

But just like Adam in the Garden - when God asks a question, He already knows the answer. But He asks it for their benefit. They refuse to answer and Jesus teaches them anyway. He sits down. He calls the Twelve. And He says to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And He takes a small child, and he takes him - this small child - in the midst of them. One they all could agree is probably the last among any of them. One who doesn't do anything cool except for open his eyes. And He takes him into His arms and says, "Whoever receives one such child in my Name receives me. Whoever receives me receives not me but Him who sent me."

The disciples are silent when they should speak up. When they have a question and they don't understand something they sit there quietly. When they're confronted with their sin, they sit there quietly. The only time they speak is when they're quarreling and arguing amongst themselves. Their lives are truly driven by their own tongues, and their days are shaped. Their tongues are set on fire on the entire course of life, as James writes it.

And we see this in ourselves constantly. That's one of the benefits of looking at the disciples and why they don't write out their errors. Because they show us that even these disciples who are in the presence of Christ have the same exact failings that each and every one of us do. We speak when we should be quiet. We speak of our own good deeds. We speak of others wrongdoings. Nothing gives us greater joy, really, than to talk about ourselves, and to talk about how evil and awful and wrong other people are. That plagues ourselves individually, it plagues churches. It plagues pastors. It's in each and every one of us.

And then the times in which we should speak up, we're silent. When we don't understand something, we don't turn to God and ask Him. Here, we have the Scriptures, God's Word preserved for us, and yet how often do we actually look at it? We pray in the Collect of the Word that we would inwardly digest this Word that God has given to teach us about Himself. And how often do we even open it to look at it?

We're silent when we should have questions. And when we don't understand something, there's nothing *wrong* with asking questions. In fact it's a very Lutheran thing to do. If you remember confirmation class and open up your catechisms, you see that. That's how Jesus teaches, is in asking questions and giving answers. And yet we sit here silently when we do't understand something and just let it blow over when God has important truths to teach us.

And then often we are very much like the disciples when we are confronted with our sin. We don't like to admit it. We don't really like to look at ourselves and come to church on Sunday mornings and confess our sins - which is the first thing that we do. In fact, when our college students at CU bring friends, they don't complain about the tradition or the organ or anything like that. The thing they complain about is, they say, "Why do we have to admit our sin, the very first thing when we come in??" Because that's not what we want to do.

And yet, we are sinful. That's where the glory of God comes in. While our tongues do shape our lives, they don't shape what Jesus does for us. It doesn't stop Jesus from doing what He should do. The disciples' not asking questions does not stop Jesus from teaching them about what His death and resurrection will be, as He continues over and over to teach them. And as He teaches us over and over every Sunday as we come here, and we hear of Christ crucified, and we hear of our sin, He gives us the words to say in admitting our sin, and then He tells us of forgiveness. The forgiveness that He has won on the Cross. When we fail to ask questions, He asks them of us, and He gives us the answers. He continues to teach us, just as He continued teaching the disciples. When they didn't admit their sin, He taught them anyway.

And He takes that little child and He puts it in His arms, and He says, "He who receives this little one in My Name receives me." Jesus, the One who came into the world as such a little one, Who lived His life in perfection and goes to the Cross, not complaining but speaking all of the words He should, as we see throughout the whole Passion of Christ. Not answering the questions when He shouldn't, speaking up when He should. Speaking and saying, "Lord, forgive them. They do not know what they do." And being silent when they say, "If you are the Christ, why don't you come down from the Cross?"

That is the glory of God. Even through our failings, He continues to come to us and teach us. Even in our poor, miserable state as dead sinners, He comes and He brings life to us in the waters of Baptism and with His Body and His Blood, continuing over and over again to teach us of Who He is and what He has come to do.

He comes and He brings us peace. He comes and He brings us life, as He marches towards the Cross to win salvation for those of us who complain like the disciples. Those of us who argue and bicker about who is the greatest. He comes for all of us. And He comes and He gives us forgiveness. He gives us life, through His life. Through His life, through His death, and through His resurrection.

Now may this peace of God which surpasses all of our understanding - may it guard, may it keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.