**St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Perth**

**Sunday, September 15th, 2024**

**Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Taming the Tongue**

**Proper 19**

**James 3:1-12**

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

O God, you summon the day to dawn,

you teach the morning to waken the earth.

**For you, the valleys shall sing for joy,**

**the trees of the field shall clap their hands.**

For you, the kings of the earth shall bow,

the poor and the persecuted shall shout for joy.

**Your love and mercy shall last forever,**

**fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise.**

Great is your name.

**Great is your love. Amen.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

With you, gracious God,

we move into this time of worship,

grateful that you are never farther

than the reach of our need and our prayer.

You who tower over the universe

are yet intimately present,

always renewing the face of the earth,

always renewing the faith of your children.

Now, in your mercy, make your way past

all that worries and distracts us

to lodge in us anew and to center

our small worship on your great glory. **Amen.**

**Children’s Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Almighty and merciful God,**

**we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.**

**We have followed too much**

**the devices and desires of our own hearts.**

**We have offended against your holy laws.**

**We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;**

**and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.**

**O Lord, have mercy upon us.**

**Spare those who confess their faults.**

**Restore those who are penitent,**

**according to your promises declared to the world**

**in Christ Jesus, our Lord.**

**And grant, O merciful God, for his sake,**

**that we may live a holy, just, and humble life**

**to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the good news!

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,

whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,

and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Know that in Jesus,

God embraces you, forgives you,

and strengthens you to live a renewed life.

Thanks be to God

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,**

**Forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn #485: “Saviour Like a Shepherd Lead Us”**

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us:
much we need your tender care;
in your pleasant pastures feed us;
for our use your folds prepare:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have bought us; yours we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have bought us, yours we are.

We are yours; in love befriend us;
be the guardian of our way;
keep your flock from sin, defend us;
seek us when we go astray:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
hear your children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
hear your children when we pray.

Let us always seek your favour;
let us always do your will.
Jesus Christ our only Saviour,
with yourself our spirits fill:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have loved us; love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have loved us; love us still.

**Responsive Reading**

**Psalm 119: 1-8**

119 Blessed are those whose way is blameless,

who walk in the law of the LORD!

**2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,**

**who seek him with their whole heart,**

3 who also do no wrong,

but walk in his ways!

**4 You have commanded your precepts**

**to be kept diligently.**

5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast

in keeping your statutes!

**6 Then I shall not be put to shame,**

**having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.**

7 I will praise you with an upright heart,

when I learn your righteous rules.

**8 I will keep your statutes;**

**do not utterly forsake me!**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “To Touch The Heart of God”**

**Prayer for illumination**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Scripture**

**James 3:1-12**

**3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.**

**How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. 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. 7For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.**

**Sermon**

A wise man once said, ‘I have often regretted my speech, only rarely my silence!’ As human beings we often let our words get us into places and situations that we should not, and this is why James tells us that if anyone can control their tongue, they can in fact control their whole being. The problem is that no man in this world is capable of controlling his tongue.

Once again James is going to try to help us to overcome our failings, and through a focus on our walk with Christ become better Christians.

Unfortunately, we do not take our speech as seriously as we should. Often, we will make excuses for our language, or justify the things we say, or even dismiss them as being simply a joke or spoken in haste. However, even though we do not often acknowledge it to ourselves and others, the truth is that every word that we speak has an impact on the life of those who hear it. Our words have real power and real consequences.

 James starts by explaining the importance of our tongue, and by proxy our words.

**James 3:1-2**

**3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.**

James advises us not to seek to be a teacher. In the modern church it can be challenging to find someone willing to teach a Bible study. Not many are willing to tackle trying to explain the Scripture to others. However, in Jame’s day the position of teachings the Scriptures was highly coveted and respected, and because of that there were many people who sought to teach the Scriptures, not because of a passion for the Word, but because of the prestige attached to the position.

Even though this warning is delivered to those who were seeking to be teachers it does reach further. The purpose of teaching is to influence students towards discovering the truth if it is done in earnest, and the primary tool of a teacher is the tongue. We are all called to be disciples and teachers as we bring the Word of God into the lives of those around us, that is the Great Commission. Through our words and our lives, we teach others about God, the truth of good and evil in this world and that is something of life and death importance. So, there is some strong language used around this idea of teaching. James says those who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

James is once again showing this command of the Greek language. The Greek word that is translated here as strictness is ‘krima’ and it means the decision of a judge, whether that is a favorable or unfavorable judgement. So what James is actually saying is that those who teach the Word of God faithfully in their lives will receive a commendation, and those who teach it falsely in their lives will receive condemnation.

This is echoed in the book of Matthew.

**Matthew 18:6**

**6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**

Jesus warns that those who lead young Christians away from the faith through teaching falsely about sin will suffer what was considered one of the worst possible kinds of death to the people of the time, one where your soul was eternally lost.

This is why James is so focused on teaching the faithful about the importance of the tongue in their lives, it is something that needs to be taken seriously because whether we are in the role of being a teacher or not, our words still have an impact upon others.

James also acknowledges that we are not perfect. He states that ‘we all stumble in many ways.’ He includes himself in those who stumble, because truthfully as human beings we all struggle against our sinful nature and we are all susceptible to falling, to failing, and we need to take our call to walk the holy life seriously, lest that stumbling become a habit. If we are careless, not paying attention, or not focused it is far more likely that we will stumble and fall. And if we are struggling to walk, because of all our stumbling, it is hard to lead others down the correct path.

Next James brings the focus back to the importance of the tongue in our walk with God. He states if we never stumble in our speech, we are perfect and able to control every aspect of our lives. And if we cannot control our tongue, we cannot control any other aspect of our lives.

James once again emphasizes the importance of bridling our tongue, keeping it in check, the same language he used in the first chapter of this book.

Which is why we should always be aiming to use our tongue, our language, and our words, carefully.

Rember way back to Sunday School, ‘Be careful little tongue what you say. Be careful little tongue what you say. The Father up above is looking down in love so be careful little tongue what you say.’ Anyone who went to Sunday School probably learned and faithfully sang that song, but how many of us have actually lived it?

**James 3:3-7**

**3If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.**

**How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. 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.**

Just like the bit in a horse’s mouth can control it, or just like how a small rudder on a large ship can direct it, the tongue, one of the smallest organs in the human body, can control someone’s course in life. The tongue is indeed a powerful tool.

We can all probably think of examples in people’s lives where a few words have either had a positive impact or negative impact in the lives of others. In our own lives we can probably think of a time or two when someone said something that either helped us or hurt us, without them even being aware of the impact of what they had said. A few words simply said in passing can have a very profound influence on the lives of those around us. We may never know the influence of the words we use on those around us, and that is why we need to use our tongue so carefully in this world.

In the teachings of the Jews of that time words took on being, reality or existence, meaning that once they were spoken, they could not be revoked, or taken back. The best Biblical example of this is when Isaac was tricked into blessing Jacob with the blessing that was intended for Esau. Even though he recognized what had happened it was too late, the words were spoken and could not be revoked or taken back.

This is why we need to be slow to anger and slow to speak. When we say things in the heat of the moment, when we speak carelessly, we need to understand that even if we are sorry, we cannot take back what was said, the influence and impact of our words has already taken place.

The tongue is a powerful tool, however it can be harnessed and controlled. We are given the example of the tongue being a bit or a rudder. However, we need to remember that the bit or the rudder is given its direction from something else. While the bit controls the direction and speed with which a horse moves, and a rudder controls the direction a ship sails, they do not do that on their own. There is someone holding the bridle that is connected to the bit, there are hands upon the ships wheel which determine the direction of the rudder.

The tongue is not some wild uncontrollable beast, instead it is a tool that is meant to be used to direct our lives. So, the question we all need to ask ourselves is who is the one in control of our tongue? James is saying it is not enough to just know that our tongue influences others, we need to know who is influencing our tongue and by doing so influence us.

Which brings us into the most important aspect of understanding our tongue. The tongue is influenced by evil, ‘set on fire by hell’ and able to corrupt the entire person, the whole body as it says in the Scripture.

This once again calls back to James chapter 1 where James said.

**James 1:26-27**

**26If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. 27Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.**

Satan wants control of your tongue, to influence your language and to make your religion worthless. Satan wants to use your words to not only destroy the lives of others, but to destroy your spiritual life as well.

Once again this is a repeat of the words spoken by Christ.

**Matthew 12:36-37**

**36I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

Satan is hard at work in the world today creating a language that will condemn people rather than save them. Think about how the world today keeps creating and changing the meaning of words to conforms to the ways of the world and away from the ways of God. Think about how conforming to that language has an impact on your life and on the lives of others, and whether that subtle change could be the thing that saves or condemns a loved one.

Ask yourself who are you going to allow to influence your tongue? Who is directing the ship, God, or the world? And if you choose God you are going to need help, because controlling the tongue on our own is an impossibility for mankind.

**James 3:7-8**

 **7For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

Mankind has dominion over all the creatures of the earth, from the book of Genesis.

**Genesis 1:28**

**28And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**

However, because of the fall, we have lost the ability to have dominion over ourselves. We are slaves to our sinful nature. All because of a few simple words spoken by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, ‘Did God really say…?’ Words that we see echoed everywhere in our society today, even in the pulpits of some churches and from the mouths of those who call themselves teachers.

Because of our sinful nature we cannot tame our tongue on our own. We are powerless when we try to fight against our own sinful nature. This is why we need help; we need to turn to Christ and know that he has the power to do what no man can do, he can tame our tongues and direct our lives.

James paints a clear picture, our tongue is, ‘**a** **restless evil, full of deadly poison.**’ Just like a serpent. It has a deadly and destructive power, which can poison and corrupt our life and the lives of others unless it is brought under control. Since we cannot do that alone we need to learn to turn to God and ask for his help.

 I found a simple prayer to help us with this,

**“Dear God, so far today I’ve done alright, I haven’t gossiped, lost my temper, been nasty, or selfish or over indulgent. But in a few minutes God, I’m going to get out of bed and from then on, I’m going to need all the help I can get.”**

**Owen Bourgaize**

We do fine when we are alone or asleep, but the moment we begin to interact with others we will need all the help we can get to control our tongues.

James drives this home in his final point about our inconsistency as human beings.

**James 3:9-12**

**9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.**

The problem we have is not just Satan influencing us, or the world influencing us, it is us. We are inconsistent in our words, inconsistent in our actions, inconsistent in our lives. We praise and curse out of the same mouth as James says.

In the first chapter of James, he calls mankind doubleminded, which in Greek translates as ‘two-souled.’ We have two spirits at war within ourselves for supremacy in our lives. Whichever one is prevalent is the one that is steering the ship or controlling the bit of our tongues. James is once again making it clear that he is speaking to his brothers, not the unsaved but the saved, people who profess Christ as Lord and Saviour, just like you and me. And he is clearly telling us that this war inside needs to stop, and the Lord needs to be the one in control of who we are, otherwise we will have inconsistency in our thoughts, words, and actions. He is saying we need to be transformed.

He gives the example of salt water and fresh water, being unable to flow from the same spring. Two different kinds of fruit cannot grow on the same plant. He is making it clear that this sort of inconsistency is unnatural and wrong., however he is also pointing out the solution to the inconsistency. The solution is a singular source; one spring means one type of water, one plant means one type of fruit, so if we have one source of influence in our lives, we only produce one type of behavior in our lives.

James is also playing with words here; Salt can also be translated as ‘bitter’ and fresh as

Sweet.’ How can bitter become sweet? How can a bitter spring produce sweet water?

**Exodus 15:22-24**

**22Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” 25And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.**

God is the answer. God can transform the bitter soul into the sweet soul, the lost into the saved. God needs to be our only source of life, of influence in all we think, say, and do in this world.

The tongue of man is governed by the nature of man, and only by having our natured transformed by the Holy Spirit are we able to have our tongues tamed. Only by having our nature changed can we have our will changed, and that can only happen if we are willing to humbly submit ourselves to God and all of his Word in our lives. Only God can change us from who we are into who he is calling for us to be, and James is warning us all that we need to do is allow God to be the one in control.

We need to be willing to submit our lives to Him, to read and obey his Word, even when we disagree, and to truthfully proclaim his Word in our thoughts, our words and our deeds as we answer his call to the Great Commission in our lives, as we walk as the Salt and Light of his Word in this broken and fallen world.

Let us pray,

**Neighborly Love, Service and Helpfulness**

Almighty and eternal God,

we are poor sinners

and stand under your righteous judgment.

With all our hearts

we thank you for taking all our guilt from us

and laying it on your dear Son Christ Jesus.

Graciously sustain us in faith

and govern us by your Holy Spirit,

that we may live according to your will,

in neighborly love, service, and helpfulness,

and not give way to wrath or revenge,

that we may not incur your wrath

but always find in you a gracious Father;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one true God, now and forever.

*Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Trinity 22*

**Hymn: “Night Song”**

VERSE 1

In the darkness God will keep me He will stay and never sleep

In the darkness God is brighter though the night is long and deep.

CHORUS

All this day Your hand has held me God of Heaven by my side

Thank you Father for your goodness You will hold me through the night.

VERSE 2

In the shadows You are with me and You know my every fear

IN the shadows none can harm me for the mighty God is here. (Chorus)

VERSE 3

So, I find my rest in Jesus He who came to rescue me

Jesus saved me from the darkness I will rise to life with Him. (Chorus)

**Invitation to Offering**

**Offering**

**Offertory Prayer**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn #490: “God of Grace and God of Glory”**

God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown the ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of thls hour,
for the facing of thls hour.

Set our feet on lofty places;
gird our lives that they may be
armoured with all Christlike graces,
pledged to set all captives free.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
that we fail not them nor thee,
that we fail not them nor thee!

Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the search for thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore,
serving thee whom we adore.

**Pastoral Prayer**

With you, wondrous God, we move from this time of worship.

Thank you for calling us to worship you and for accepting

our praises as a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to you.

Thank you, O God, that your Word came to us in power,

inspired by your Holy Spirit.

Thank you for nourishing us with your Word and Spirit

and strengthening us with your grace for the days ahead.

Thank you for listening to prayers that rose to you from humble hearts.

Thank you for surrounding us with brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

who love us, share our triumphs and disappointments,

and support us in times of need.

Thank you that our offering may provide relief

for those who suffer in poverty of body or spirit.

In the week ahead, O God, may we turn each moment of joy into praise,

and may we cling to your promise in times of suffering.

Guide us, O God, so that we can obey you.

Make your light shine through us

so that others will see our good deeds and glorify you.

Fill our lives with love for you, O God,

and for the world that so desperately needs its Savior, in whom we pray. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

As you leave this place this day,

may God’s love sustain you,

and may you love those who surround you.

May God’s Spirit empower you,

and may you empower all those you meet.

May God’s joy fill your hearts,

and may this joy overflow

to the ends of the earth for God’s glory,

now and forever. **Amen.**