

16 S after Pentecost 9/12/21
James 3:1-12 19B

NO HUMAN BEING CAN TAME THE TONGUE. IT IS A RESTLESS EVIL, FULL OF DEADLY POISON. WITH IT WE BLESS OUR LORD AND FATHER, AND WITH IT WE CURSE PEOPLE WHO ARE MADE IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD.

The Word of the Lord came to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me” (Jo 1:2). So, Jonah arose and got going to ... **Tarshish**, which is about as far away from Nineveh as you can get, because Jonah didn’t like the Ninevites very much. He just ignored God’s command.

God knew what Jonah had done and wasn’t please with it, so He sent a great storm upon the sea. The sailors on that ship were afraid and each cried out to his own god. But the storm just got worse, so they cast lots to see who was the cause of all this and the lot fell on Jonah. Long story short: They took Jonah and threw him overboard, into the heart of the sea and the sea stopped its raging.

In His mercy, God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah and he was in the belly of that fish three days and three nights. In the belly of that fish, he cried out to God and said this,

The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD my God.
When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.

Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the LORD” (2:5-9)!

And God spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah up upon the dry land. And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, crying out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4). The Ninevites believed God and repented, and God relented of the disaster He had planned to bring upon Nineveh. And Jonah, our friend Jonah, was **angry** and not one bit pleased that the people of Nineveh had repented. So, he said this to God,

“O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live” 4:2-3).

You heard what Jonah said in the belly of the fish. You heard what Jonah said when God decided to spare Nineveh. So, in light of those two things Jonah said, let me ask you this, “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?” (vv. 11-12). The answer to those questions is “No!”. Can blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth? Well, judging by Jonah’s example, in the belly of the fish, he blesses God, asking Him to spare Him. Then Jonah, out of his anger that God spared the city of Nineveh, curses his own life and asks that he would be dead. So, **yes**, blessing and cursing can come from the same mouth.

But you don’t need Jonah to show you that. **You have your own mouth.**

Here you are this morning and what are you doing? You're blessing God, singing, "We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory." With our mouths, we are blessing our God and Father.

That is until you get to the closing hymn and you realize that the only thing standing between you and kick off is the closing hymn, all 16 stanzas of it that Pastor thinks you should sing, and by the time you get to stanza 15, you are crying, "Raca! Fool!" And it only gets worse if you are a Catechism student. You come to class, Pastor checks to see if your assignment is done and if you did your memory work, and then he gives you yet another assignment and more memory work, and you say, "Raca! Fool!" You go to work and there's your boss and that know-it-all co-worker and you say "Raca! Fool!" to both of them. You come home to discover that your wife -- your rib, your helpmate -- has made tofu for dinner or that Neanderthal you married -- again -- left his wet towel on the bathroom floor or your children are slow getting ready for school in the morning when you are already late for work, or they're playing video games instead of doing their homework. And you have words for them, words you would never even dream of speaking in Church. You use words that would make a lot of people blush. From the same mouth, from **your mouth**, come both blessing and cursing. "My brothers, these things out not to be so" (v. 10).

But it is so because you do it. You do it even though you know what God's Commandment has to say about your tongue and how to use. The 8th Commandment teaches us that we are not to tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him or hurt his reputation, but defend him and explain everything in the kindest way. And yet, how often like our friend Jonah, do you not do what God commands. Rather, as James tell us,

“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. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (vv. 6-8).

You can't tame the tongue. And that makes you a sinner, one deserving God's condemnation.

But, the GOOD NEWS for you, Dear Child of God, is that that is not the final word. God's Word is the final Word. God's Word is the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Jesus took on flesh and blood to save you.

You use your tongue and your mouth to go to God in repentance to say, “I've sinned against You. I've used my tongue to bless you. But, I've also used it to curse You and my neighbor. I've said many things I should never say.”

The Gospel teaches us that God is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins. Why does God forgive? Because you did such a great job of confessing? Because you're really, really sorry? No, but because Jesus went to Calvary's cross to give His life as the wages of your sin. And from the altar of the cross, He used His tongue, He used His mouth, to say, “It is finished.” All your sin and all your death is finished, because it's all forgiven in the blood of Jesus Christ.

And He rose the 3rd day to come to you this very day to speak that forgiveness to you. And He does it through a human tongue and a human mouth that says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;” that says to you, “As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins;” that

says to you, "Take eat, take drink; this is My body, this is My blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Sunday School starts today. In our classrooms, God uses the tongues and mouths of our teachers to tell our children the love Jesus has for them. This world, in all its perversity, tries to squeeze us into its mold and condemns when we don't conform to its ways. It can be lonely, scary, but the tongues and mouths of our teachers comfort our children that they are never alone. And even if they stray and wander, the Good Shepherd finds them and carries them home on his shoulders.

What sweet comfort that gives for you who has a tongue that cannot be tamed. Those aren't just words. Those are words that do exactly what they say. They really give you forgiveness, life, and salvation. And to that, our tongues and our mouths say, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Co 15:57).