

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: James 3:1-12
Related Text: Mark 8:27-38
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Date Preached: September 13, 2009
Note: Rally Day and Baptism.

Grace to you and peace from God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How did you use your tongue this week? That is probably not something we think about very often. So I invite you to think about all the uses of the tongue.

With our tongues we experience things that are sweet and sour. It may be a scrumptious meal, the glue of an envelope, the cool refreshment of ice cream, or perhaps some icky medicine that someone tells you will help you feel better.

Our tongues are important tools for us to communicate. Our tongues have a tremendous capacity; they serve as instruments of great praise and instruments of massive destruction. Oh, we think of our voices when we communicate, but the tongue also has an important place in our lives.

With our tongues we speak, but what do we say. Our tongues can:

Wound or praise;	hurt or help;
Tear down or build up;	bind or set free;
Deny or confess;	Insult or forgive;
Curse or bless;	Rebuke or encourage.

The tongue gets in our way as we bite down causing us momentary pain. Yet, there are times when it is good to accept the momentary pain of biting our tongues as opposed to the wounds we needlessly and carelessly inflict.

It is better to bite the tongue than pass along a rumor that hurts a neighbor and serves to chip away at their self-esteem. It is better to accept the momentary pain of biting our tongues as opposed to fanning the flames of society's ills with racial, sexist or discriminatory jokes.

The Biblical book James has a special warning about the dangers of the tongue. Not only is it a warning to all readers but especially teachers. Teachers, be alert. "...for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." Your children are hearing the words that come from your tongue whether you think they are listening or not.

Yet, for all the dangers of the tongue, it is a gift from God. As a gift from God the wonderful uses of the tongue are as plentiful as the tastes we experience.

With our tongues we confess our faith in the company of the whole church using ancient creeds that countless saints have spoken before us. In a community of faith we are uplifted with a common belief.

With our tongues we offer forgiveness that comes from God and that we are bid to proclaim. Words of forgiveness dripping wet in the waters of baptism can snuff the affects of another's misspoken and hurtful words.

With our tongues we boldly proclaim with Peter that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the one who suffered at the hands of evil. Jesus is the one who in the language of Isaiah, "did not turn backward. Jesus did not hide his face from insult and spitting." Jesus felt the sting of death.

Each sin of the tongue drove another nail in his hands and feet. Each ill advised statement is another pain and insults our Lord bears. Even selfish statements like the one uttered by Peter after his confession, "Lord, this must not happen." is a statement of

temptation for Jesus to avoid the cross is taken upon the body of Christ on the cross.

Jesus death and resurrection transforms the tongue and transforms our whole selves. Jesus sets us free from trying to say the popular things, to speaking the truth.

Teachers, throughout this school year be bold and strong in what you teach. God has given you the tongues of a teacher to sustain the weary, enlighten the confused, and guide the lost.

That is what the Word of God does for us. Not only is it a Word we all share, regardless of our professions, it is a sweet word. It is a Word that is placed on our tongues, take and eat, this is my body given for you. Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you.

Give thanks to God for the gift of your tongue. With our tongues come the ability to comfort, to offer hope, to proclaim Christ and the new life we have through him, and to uphold one another in Christian love. AMEN.