

“Gracious is the Lord and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.” AMEN!

We have some words and phrases
that are forbidden around the Holdcraft house.

Don't worry, I will not list them all
out for you today, especially the obvious ones
that sometimes just feel so good to say.

Like the expletive that pours out
when you stub your toe on the stair or
drop a dish from the cupboard.

When one does something dumb like that
there's a weird balm of solace that happens
when we can cuss it out even when
the words are forbidden.

The words I am talking about is the phrase “shut-up.”

It has been forbidden in the Holdcraft house
for as long as I can remember.

It was a wisdom taught early on to me that
I never fully understood until this past week.

The words, “shut-up” are words that are
quite abusive when they're

used in anger toward another person.

These forbidden words demand
another to be submissive in unhealthy and
non-loving ways, and very often

They lead to an escalation of violence.

They close the ears and cause rebellion.

The exact opposite to what Isaiah speaks about
in our reading this morning.

“The tongue of a teacher sustains
the weary with a word.

Morning by morning the teacher wakens
to listen as those who are taught.”

What Isaiah is talking about here is
the wisdom of the teacher to be able
to view themselves as a student.

For the student suffers the process of learning
and so must the teacher.

And it is this truth in understanding that
reveal James’ message for us today
when he wrote:

Not many of you should become teachers.

For if one is not gifted, or ready,
or wise enough to be a teacher then
they might use such a position of authority
to pump themselves up or hurt other people.

And when a teacher assumes themselves
no longer a student then “great forests are set
ablaze by small fires produced by the tongue.”

The tongue then produces words among
the members that promote iniquity.

That is, immoral or grossly unfair behavior.

You see, it is not about bad language,
nor is James writing about using
the Lord’s name in vain.

These are not the restless evil or deadly poison
unleashed by the tongue.

I have heard words of hope and
expressions on encouragement from people
who use the “F” word or the “S” one
enough times to decide it’s not about
colorful or shocking language,
but about abusive power unleashed by words
that hurt or demean.

Who’s tongue should we listen to?

How can we be sure their tongue
is tame?

This question is one that we need to ask ourselves
every single day and well as be on guard to
what comes off of our own tongue. (Pause)

All of this sets us up to hear once again
the gospel encounter told in Mark this morning.

Keeping in mind the forbidden words “shut-up” and
the student/teacher relationship we find
a bit of wisdom that can make us want
to wiggle out of our own obedience
to follow Jesus. (Pause)

The first comes when Jesus questioned
the disciples about what people are saying
about him?

Some say he’s John the baptizer resurrected,
others say Jesus is one of the prophets, or
even Elijah come back to earth.

Notice, none of the “other people” have come
to the believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

When Jesus next focused in toward
his closest followers and asked,

“But who do you say that I am?”

We find Peter's wise proclamation:
You are the Messiah.

Peter identified Jesus properly, but
something's amiss.

Instead of "good answer Peter, or well done!"

We find Jesus
telling Peter to "shut-up." (Pause)

Now, I know our translation says:
"And he sternly ordered them not to
tell anyone about him,"

but "epitomeo" is the same Greek word
used "to bottle" or "to shut-up" the demons
that possessed the man in
the synagogue at Capernaum in 1:25,

and the same word used when Jesus
silenced or "shut-up" the storm in 4:39 and

he the same word used to heal the boy
with unclean spirits in 9:25.

But in this section of Mark, we find "shut-up"
used 3 times.

The first we have already discussed.

The second was when Peter tried to “shut-up”
Jesus when Peter could not take the words
that Jesus taught them:

That the Son of Man must suffer and die...

Peter’s definition of Messiah could not come
to this conclusion so he tried to “shut-up” Jesus.

His misunderstanding led him to try to wiggle
out of his calling to follow Jesus.

And who can blame him, right?

How do we also try to wiggle out of this text
to follow Jesus into areas of suffering and sacrifice?

“It’s too hard,” we say.

“Let the teacher do it,” or simply claim “He’s not
talking to me.”

As commentator Clifton Black wrote,
“In no Gospel does Jesus say,

“It is my responsibility to die for you,
while you applaud my heroism.”

Jesus never taught that but it is
exactly what we want to do.

You sacrifice, we'll cheer for you.

We want to focus on what the Messiah is supposed to do for us.

While Jesus wants to know,
“Are you coming with me, or not?” (Pause)

As we look back 20 years ago and recall
the act of sacrifice and heroism that occurred in
the final minutes of Flight 93, I'm amazed at
the actions taken by

the passengers and crew to take back
control of the aircraft.

With the plane under the control of terrorists it
was minutes away from causing further death
and destruction on September 11, 2001.

The passengers and crew fought to regain control of
the airplane because they knew that if
they didn't then it was going to
be used as a missile
to cause harm to countless others.

Working together they broke down the door
to the cockpit and fought tooth and nail
to regain the airplane.

Their decision to
either take back control or
crash land the plane was heroic.

Unfortunately we know which outcome arrived
but the heroism and sacrifice saved countless
other lives as the plane smashed into a
field in Shanksville, PA.

Few of us will be asked to carry such a cross as this,
but all of us in essence must be ready for the request.

How are you and I being called to the cross?

Let's not trivialize it or tell the voice to shut-up. (Pause)

Even in times of separation, I know you
have discovered new ways of discipleship.

You're providing housing, giving gift cards,
making phone calls, donating food, and
you are putting yourself at risk doing things
for other people.

It's God's wisdom that tells us
"Save equals lose and lose equals find."

In God's mathematics we are taught to lose life
in order to save life.

"We are privileged to know everyday folks

who have so internalized this quality of discipleship
that, in the critical moment, they know
what a to do.

There's Armand D. Williams, Jr.,
the passenger aboard Air Florida Flight 90 on
January 13, 1982, which after take-off crashed
into Washington's 14th Street Bridge,
then into the icy Potomac River.

Fighting a lifelong fear of water,
clinging to twisted wreckage, Armand Williams
handed over to the five other survivors
one life vest after another.

When all but Armand had been pulled ashore,
the helicopter returned to the
site to save him.

He was gone." (Pause)

Most of us will never master such sacrifice or
solve the mathematic calculation of
God's equation to lose in order to save.
But one thing's for sure, failure should not
be the enemy of aspiration.

We know the way.

We follow Jesus who
calls your name.

AMEN!