

The 16th Sunday after Pentecost
September 12th, 2021

“Set the world on fire with your Gospel speaking tongue!”
(James 3:5)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this 16th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading – James 3:5.

**“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.
See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”**

Here ends our text.

I. The untamed tongue causes much spiritual harm like a forest fire

One of the telltale symptoms that a person has contracted the Covid virus is that he or she loses the sense of taste. A person loses control over one’s tongue to distinguish different flavors. I’ve heard it takes a while for this sense to come back even after one gets over the virus.

James talks about this member of the body, the tongue, that no man has tamed. Every beast of the world has been tamed, both large and small, but not the tongue. The words that one speaks can either be a blessing or curse. They can’t be both. No spring yields fresh and salt water. You can’t get figs from a grapevine. But there is one who has tamed the tongue, where all men failed.

“He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.” (1 Peter 2:12)

There is good news in Jesus this morning. He who also made the dumb to speak and the deaf to hear, also sent the Holy Spirit to come with tongues of fire for His church.

In the war against Covid, the battle wages on about whether the mouth that speaks and releases airborne particles of the virus should be covered up with a mask or

not. Our governor is suing school districts and the school districts are suing the governor. It's a big mess. President Biden mandated that all federal employees cover up their mouths with a mask. Yet, if you catch a college football game on TV, the stadiums are packed and the people are for the most part maskless. They've decided not to cover up their tongues as they cheer on their team.

We've seen this virus, especially this Delta variant, spread like wild fire. At least in our area, one of our members had to spend a night in a hospital hallway this week because there wasn't an available room. I heard this week that one of our churches in Texas is in an uproar. The pastor came down with Covid. Who has he been around? Contain the wildfire!

The imagery James uses of a wildfire that starts from something small is easily understood but hard to prevent. We've seen plenty in the news lately with this hot summer. In 2002, a U.S. Forest Service employee was going through some marital problems with her estranged husband. She felt emotionally burned. After reading a love letter from him, she then burned it and it accidentally started a forest fire that burned 137,000 acres in Colorado. On one day alone it ran 19 miles. "See how great a forest a little fire kindles!"

It just takes a little spark to cause much destruction. A fire in Boulder Canyon, started by a cigarette, burned more than 2,000 acres, destroying 40 homes and causing roughly \$10 million in damage. Recreational shooters have started major fires when a fragment from a hot bullet starts a grass fire. Campfires left unattended or someone burning some trash, are just a few of the ways that forest fires are started. They're started by humans - 90% of the time.

The forest fire that James is talking about does not result from natural causes like a lightning strike, but is caused again, by humans, by sinful men, women and children - 100% of the time. The tongue is a little member of the body, but as James writes,

"...no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so." (James 3:8-10)

Yes, James is writing to Christian brothers and sisters. It tells each of us that all believers are in this daily struggle, you and me included.

“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2)

And none of us is a perfect man, woman or child. How the students struggle in our school to tame their tongues. Some call it drama. It's our sinful nature.

Paul reminded us in our Epistle readings from Ephesians, which we just finished hearing,

“Ephesians 4:29

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

James tells us that evil words that the tongue says begin small, but quickly become a wildfire. Of course, there are slanders which the world is all too eager to repeat. But James is talking especially about false teaching that gets repeated and accepted as if it is true. Teachers of God's word are judged more strictly, because the consequences are eternal for the listener. Each of us has to be careful of the doctrine we teach in our homes and to our circles of people to make sure that it is according to God's word.

I answered a phone call yesterday from someone who wanted to read a Bible passage to me. He said that with Covid it's harder to meet in person, so he wanted to speak to me over the phone. Sounds innocent enough, right?

I asked him, what version of the Bible he was going to be using? He said the New World Version. This is, of course, the version that the Jehovah Witnesses have created to coincide with their false doctrine.

The New World Translation is an intentional, systematic effort at producing a complete version of the Bible that is edited and revised for the specific purpose of agreeing with this group's doctrine. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watchtower Society realized that their beliefs contradicted Scripture. So, rather than conforming their beliefs to Scripture, they altered Scripture to agree with their beliefs. And the forest fire of false doctrine has spread to cause 18 million presently in this world with their lies. This is what their members have to do in order to stay active members. For 2020, 1.7 billion hours of “preaching” was reported.

Well, is the Jehovah Witness Bible Translation really bad? I mean they call the New World translation a Bible? Yes, the tongues that speak the New World Translation indeed have set off a forest fire of evil.

Jesus is believed to be a created being and not God. So, John 1:1 is translated “The Word was a god”. Jesus’ purpose according to the online Jehovah Witnesses Bible notes is to “enlighten mankind on their way to gain life.” So, Jesus is just an enabler for man to save himself. Yes, that’s works righteousness.

And you won’t find the word “hell” in their version because the Jehovah Witnesses don’t believe in it. In verse 6 of our Epistle the word hell is omitted by the Jehovah Witnesses in their version and replaced with Gehenna.

“The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”

But, hell will find those who deny Jesus as their God and Lord.

Jehova Witnesses are just one example of the false doctrine that an evil tongue spreads, set on fire by hell itself.

False teaching is interwoven into popular TV shows. On the #3 most popular show on Netflix, one of the lead characters is asked what she believes will happen when you die. She says that she believes that if a person is thinking a happy thought when you die, then that happy thought continues after death. So, I try to think happy thoughts all the time. I’m sure, unfortunately, that many will believe and repeat such craziness.

II. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the tongue is used to profess faith in Jesus and proclaim His Good News of salvation

But, thanks be to God there is one who is stronger than the devil. And God has preserved His true Word for us to hear today. God’s word gives us many happy thoughts for our soul based on what the Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God has done for all mankind.

So we hear from Isaiah 53 how His tongue kept silent as He bore our sin.

**“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,**

**And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.**

So Peter continues with this truth in 1 Peter 2 that,

“when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” (1 Peter 2:23-24)

The true Word of God, not a perversion of it, tells us that salvation is found alone in Christ. The tongues of the prophets and apostles were given this Good News to tell to the world. And God’s word continues to be proclaimed to us today.

**“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15)**

So, Paul exclaims that God’s word itself gives sinful man this glad tidings and happiest of thoughts. And creates faith in the heart of the hearer to believe in Jesus.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17)

What does the tongue do that has received such a gift in one’s soul? Paul again tells us in Romans 10.

“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Men, women and children make this confession by the power of the Holy Spirit. He ignites the fire of faith. Psalm 8:2 tells us that,

**“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.”**

God has proclaimed to your ears His saving truths in Jesus. That you also would shod your feet with the shoes of peace as part of your amor of God. Your feet bring the good things of blessing, not curse, when you proclaim the truth of Jesus. He is true Man and True God who served the world by giving His life for the sins of all people.

Yes, the tongue can boast of great things, both good and evil. But Paul says in Galatians 6,

“God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14)

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the sparks of His love will continue to kindle and burn like a fire in the hearts of the people you and I proclaim Christ crucified to. We pray for each other that God would give us tongues to speak His truth as Paul said in the last chapter of Ephesians.

“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Abide in God’s word, boldly proclaim His word like Paul with the tongues of blessing that God has given you. And Jesus will set the world on fire with His truth, that sets you free. Jesus lovingly protects His church in His hand from false teaching as St. John pictures Him in Revelation chapter 1.

“He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.” (Revelation 1:16)

Yes, from His mouth comes the two-edged sword of His word, Law and Gospel, to bring sinful men to repentance and salvation in Him! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)