

Sermon – September 12, 2021
Caring Ministry Sunday

James 3:1-12

Let us pray,
Let the words of our mouths and the mediations of all of our hearts be
pleasing to you, O Lord. Amen

Serving God Through our Words

The reading from the letter of James reminded me of a memory from when I was maybe 6 or 7 years old, and one of the neighbor kids was calling me names. I can't remember what names they were calling me, but I remember that my feelings were hurt.

I did what most kids do in a situation like this, I ran to my mom. After hearing my tale of woe, my mom said, "If it happens again, just say, "Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but names will never hurt me."

Wow! I was now armed with a clever retort, I felt indestructible, like I had a suit of armour on!

Sure enough before long, that same kid called me names again. And guess what I did?

I said, "Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but names will never hurt me."

Do you know what they did?

They called me more names!

And it hurt just as much, and maybe even more so, because I thought I had a foolproof response that would stop them in their tracks. So I felt blindsided.

So honestly, I think that "sticks and stones" saying is a load of crap!

I actually looked up its origin and Wikipedia informed me that it's a rhyme that's used as a defense against name-calling and verbal bullying, intended to increase resiliency, avoid physical retaliation and to remain calm.¹

But it didn't serve that purpose for a sensitive kid like me!

Because we do know that words can harm us and we know that we can harm others through our words. Because we've all experienced it.

The irony of hearing the Bible reading from James about a week before a national election did not escape me. After watching a debate between the Regina-Lewvan candidates with my husband this past week and listening in on the national leadership debate on Thursday evening, I think that the quality of the exchanges could only be improved if this section from the letter of James were read prior to each political debate!

Just imagine if the candidates heard these words prior to a debate:

"We use the tongue to say, "Praised be our God and Creator"; then we use it to curse each other—we who are created in the image of God. Blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. This shouldn't be, my sisters and brothers!"

Honestly, I think it could only improve the respectfulness of the debate.

In the reading from James this morning, we are reminded that what we say and how we say it reflects our faith.

On this Sunday as we introduce the participants of the Caring Ministry training, we are reminded of one way in which what we say and how we say it reflects our faith.

Once the 4 of us from Christ Lutheran had completed the Stephen Ministry training at New Hope Lutheran Church, we talked about what the biggest needs were at Christ Lutheran, in terms of pastoral care, and we determined that it was connecting with the older folks in our church family who may feel more isolated because they live in a care facility, or no longer drive and perhaps live alone.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sticks_and_Stones

When I figured out what this meant in terms of numbers, I can tell you that we have 25 people over the age of 90, and we have 68 people between 80-89 years old. So that is a total of 93 people over 80 years old.

And we have 19 people in care facilities and 24 people who are homebound. So that is 43 people who are unable to come to church.

We discerned that these folks could likely benefit from an intentionally caring relationship in which someone from the church was in touch with them regularly, either by phone or visiting, or a combination of both (depending on what the current public health orders are, as well as people's comfort levels).

And as a result, we are forming the Caring Ministry Team. I would like to think that the Caring Ministry team is called to a ministry of word and presence. Because the Caring Ministry Team is called to share words of comfort, inspiration, and hope to those who need it, in addition to company and connection. You could say that the Caring Ministry team is called to serving God through their words and their presence.

What we say and how we say it reflects our faith.

But when you think about it, all of us are called to a ministry of word of presence. The Caring Ministry Team is called in a particular way to a particular group of people. But as people of faith, we're all called to this ministry of word and presence in our day to day lives with all who we interact with every day: our families, co-workers, volunteer involvements, to all those we have contact in at stores, etc.

We are all called to share words of love, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, and hope, regardless of our context.

I love how the gospel acclamation we sang, the hymn *"Word of God, Come Down on Earth"* describes this word.

Just moments ago we sang, *"Word of God, come down on earth, living rain from heav'n descending; touch our hearts and bring to birth faith and hope and love unending... Word that speaks God's tender love..."*

Sounds like a tall order, doesn't it? But it's important to remember that none of us is perfect. I remember one of my spiritual directors, years ago said to me, "God doesn't call us to be perfect, God calls us to be faithful."

So I really appreciate that the letter of James names that reality when we hear, *“After all, each of us falls from time to time.”* Other versions actually flat out say, *“For all of us make many mistakes.”* – which is likely closer to reality, at least for me!

God knows this. God knows our shortcomings and yet God continues to love and forgive us.

The letter of James reminds us that when we are left to our own devices, we will inevitably get off track now and then – or more accurately – many times (making many mistakes, as the letter of James so bluntly says)! We are reminded in the letter of James that a better guide than our own devices is the Holy Spirit. It is God’s Spirit, living in us which helps us stay on track. And when we veer off (and we will!), God’s Spirit gently guides us back.

We are all called to a ministry of word and presence. We are all called to serve God through our words, as well as through our actions. We are able to do so because of the Word of God who came down and lives in us and works through us, in what we say and do. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Pastor Lynn Robertson