



*The Power of Words*

*James 1:17-27*

*1st in the sermon series on the Epistle of James*

*Sunday, September 2nd, 2018*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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*Text: I any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. (v. 22)*

I fell in love with the Letter of James at a time in my life when I felt overwhelmed by the tasks and responsibilities of life. It was at a time before I went to seminary or was even very active in the life of the church. Seeking guidance and feeling as if I had nowhere else to turn--or maybe thinking that I had nothing to lose--I pulled a Bible off of my small bookshelf and accidentally--or Providentially--opened it to the book of James. And there I read,

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all people liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given. But ask in faith, not waveth. For he that waveth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let that that person think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded person is unstable in all his ways. (vss. 5&6) In case you haven't guessed it was a King James Bible; the bible I received from my home church years earlier. Nothing fancy. Fake leather with no inscription. We Boomers didn't have helicopter moms and dads and were too numerous to have much personal attention.

My doctoral thesis was on infant baptism and the role of a congregation in the spiritual nurture of a child. It was then that I concluded that our faith is not taught as much as it is caught. That is why I call the epistle of James "Christianity 101". If someone is wants to know how to have a Christian lifestyle I tell them to read James.

The earliest Christians did not have doctrine but practice. Acts tells us that they gathered together on the first day of the week to sing hymns, share a meal, have fellowship and one of their number would share a story of Jesus and His teachings. From this humble beginning the Christian faith exploded across the known Western world not because of its teachings but because of its living. Others saw how they loved each other, cared for each other, looked after "the orphans and the widows in their distress" and remained "unstained" by the culture of the world.

In his book [The Monday Connection](#) William E. Diehl wrote:

"In today's world "Sunday Christians" are irrelevant. The hymns, sermons, prayers, and creeds of Sunday morning have no impact upon the outside world unless they share the lives of Christians during the rest of the week. The false idols and pernicious values of society remain unchallenged unless 'Monday Christians' act and witness to their faith in everyday life in a relevant manner. ...

“For the majority of churchgoing people, Sunday morning is the time to get away from the cares of the world and to think about ‘spiritual’ things. Sunday worship is a refuge from the world. When pressed to explain how the Sunday experience relates to their daily lives, people frequently respond that they gain strength for the rest of the week. when asked how the strength shows up in their daily lives, however, they become vague.” (p.1)

Be doers of the word, James wrote, not merely hearers.

Today’s lesson challenges those of us who commit to taking Jesus seriously to be living testimonies of the One whom we worship.

It seems to me that the biggest challenges we face in being living testimonies of Christ is our words. Anyone who watched the funeral services of the late Senator John McCain or Aretha Franklin this past weekend know the power of words to bring move our emotions.

“Words create a world of meaning.”

We use words to express ourselves; to convince and convict, to describe, name, blame and label. We use words to win arguments, expound a point, explain things into or out of existence, persuade, condole, console, and counsel. We use words to announce and denounce. We use words to ask someone to marry, to declare war or peace, to sentence someone to punishment, diagnose a condition, analyze a problem, deliberate, debate or negotiate a deal.

“We cannot get along without words. Words can alarm, harm, inspire, degrade or silence” another. Words can express some of our inner thoughts.

According to James, we cannot be partners with God in building the Kingdom on earth through revengeful or evil speech, “which” he says, “only spreads destruction.”

Such speech poisons our own lives and the communities of which we are a part. (The last three paragraphs are freely quoted from Archie Smith, Jr., in the commentary Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4, Season After Pentecost)

Over the next few weeks we will look more closely at how we can be doers of the word, the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. This week I invite you to join me in reflecting upon the words we choose to use.

One tool may be The Four-Way Test of what we think, say or do. Written by Herbert J. Taylor it has found its way into service clubs (notably Rotary) and even the courtrooms of Ghana, west Africa. It consists of four simple but profound questions;

- Is it true?
- Is it fair?
- Will it build goodwill?
- Is it beneficial to all concerned?

Another tool may be one developed by Celeste Headlee, the host of the NPR program, “On Second Thought”. A couple of years ago she did a Ted Talk on 10 Ways to have a better conversation. Here are her ten:

1. Listen. “If your mouth is open, you are not learning.
2. Don’t multitask but be present.
3. Don’t pontificate. “You have to enter every conversation assuming that you have something to learn ... sometimes that means setting aside your personal opinion.
4. Use open ended questions.
5. Go with the flow.
6. If you don’t know, say you don’t know.
7. Don’t equate your experience with their experience.
8. Try not to repeat yourself.
9. Stay out of the weeds. People don’t care about the years, names, the dates, that you may struggle with.
10. Be brief.

And with that, To God Be the Glory. Amen.