

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 15th, 2024 (11:11 am)

OUR TONGUE

Psalm 116:1-9

Isaiah 50:4-10

James 3:1-12

Mark 9:14-29

Christ Jesus Delivers Us from Sin, Death and the Devil

Those who teach the Word of God *“will be judged with greater strictness”* (James 3:1) because it is by the Word that saving faith is obtained, whereas false doctrine always threatens to destroy Christian faith and life. The tongue *“boasts of great things,”* whether for good or evil (James 3:5). In fallen man, *“it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison”* (James 3:8). But anyone who bridle his tongue with the Word of God, who *“does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man”* (James 3:2). It is Christ who opens His ear to the voice of His Father, so that, with *“the tongue of those who are taught,”* He is able to sustain the weary *“with a word”* (Is. 50:4-5). Entrusting Himself to His Father, even to death, He is not put to shame but is vindicated in His resurrection (Is. 50:6-9). By His faith and faithfulness, He casts out the *“mute and deaf spirit”* from us (Mark 9:25). He has compassion on us and helps us, so that we are not destroyed but cleansed from every evil and raised up from death to life (Mark 9:22-27).

Words hold immense power, as Scripture reminds us time and again. This profound truth underscores how crucial our speech is, especially in living out our Christian faith. The tongue, though small, has a great ability to influence both for good and harm.

While most people—whether Christian or not—would likely agree with this, the reality we live in often tells a different story. Our culture doesn’t just stop at “biting our tongue” or saying something nice. We live in a society where it has become normal to tear each other down, often under the guise of trying to make things better. Social platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are filled with hurtful words, character attacks, and bullying. Words can cut deep, straight to the heart.

The saddest part is that we, as a society, have come to tolerate and even expect this type of speech. *When was the last time you heard a politician commend someone from the opposing side for doing a good job? How often do you come across uplifting stories in the media?* Harsh words, personal attacks, and demeaning speech have become the accepted way of addressing those we disagree with—or even just don't like.

Today’s Gospel reading follows the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord. As Jesus, Peter, James, and John come down from the mountain, they encounter a crowd surrounding the rest of the disciples—and an argument is taking place. The term used here

indicates that they were not simply discussing but disputing with one another. We've all seen, and probably even participated in, a heated argument. Rarely is a dispute characterized by kindness or consideration for others, particularly in cases like this, where the scribes were confronting the disciples of Jesus.

In the Epistle reading from James, we are reminded of the fiery power our words can have. James urges us to reflect on our own lives and recognize how our tongues can either harm or bless others. Instead of tearing people down, our speech should be used for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

Sometimes, we might not even realize the harm we cause. It could be a passing comment about someone's appearance, a subtle (yet truthful) remark about a family member, or even a spouse's offhand criticism of dinner.

What does Jesus say in today's Gospel reading when His disciples argue with the scribes about a boy in need of healing? He says, "O faithless generation..." Instead of bringing the boy's urgent need to the Lord in prayer, they are caught up in an argument.

The sinful nature that corrupts our hearts and tongues has been overcome through Jesus Christ. As Isaiah says, **"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter, and like a sheep silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth."** Jesus willingly endured the consequences of our fiery tongues, suffering and dying on the cross to cleanse our hearts—and yes, our tongues—so we can use them to pray, praise, and give thanks to God for the salvation He has graciously given us.

To tame our tongues and align our speech with biblical principles, we must commit to building life-giving habits:

Encouragement and Edification: Be a source of positivity by encouraging and uplifting those around us. Build others up in their faith and personal growth (*1 Thessalonians 5:11*).

Speak the Truth in Love: Whether we are teaching, correcting, or sharing the Gospel, do so with love and gentleness (*Ephesians 4:15*).

Be Slow to Speak: Thoughtful communication is key. By listening carefully, we cultivate understanding and become more responsive to the Holy Spirit (*James 1:19*).

Exercise Gracious Speech: Colossians 4:6 advises, **"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."** Strive to speak words that bring unity, healing, and peace.

By practicing life-giving communication, we align our words with God's will and have a positive impact on those we encounter. Our words carry great influence, and the impact they can have on people's lives is profound and lasting.

May God help us to use carefully our tongue to help, encourage and bless others with good and blessed words. Amen.