

..... **Daily Devotions**

March 3 - 9, 2019

By Rev. Doug Schoen
Retired Pastor, Menominee, MI

Sunday, March 3, 2019

*“For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.” Psalm 139:13-14*

What a life-affirming thought—you are “wonderfully made!” If you are ever having a bad day or thinking less of yourself than you should, focus on what the psalmist declares-- you are “wonderfully made.” That is not only a fact, it is a value judgment.

If ever I wonder if there really is a God, or why I believe God does exist, I just consider the human body with all its functioning parts and capabilities and see it as undeniable proof that we are products of an intelligent Creator. What’s more, I consider the five senses and see them as evidence that the Creator is a personal, relational God and, therefore, made us to live in relationship with God and with the world around us. This, to me, is what it means to be created “in the image of God.” God created us to taste, touch, hear, see and smell the world into which God has placed us.

With the help of the apostle James, I am going to focus my devotional messages this week largely on two of those senses—tasting/speaking and hearing—in other words, the tongue and the ears. For today, meditate on Psalm 139 and give thanks to God for making you the wonderful person you are.

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord God, that we are “wonderfully made.” Help us to regard ourselves and others with the love you have for us and the value you place on us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Monday, March 4, 2019

*“O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.” Psalm 34:8-9*

The Psalmist uses the sense of taste as a metaphor for faith.

Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899) was one of the most popular orators on the lecture circuit during what is referred to as the “golden age of free thought.” He could deliver a 3-hour long speech from memory and captivate his audiences. He could speak on a number of topics, but was best known for railing against religion in general and Christianity in specific. He was nicknamed “The Great Agnostic”.

During one such lecture, a man sitting in the rear of the lecture hall pulled out an orange and started peeling it. This caught Ingersoll’s attention, but he stifled his annoyance and continued his lecture on the absurdity of Christianity. When he completed his lecture and opened the floor to questions, the man with the orange stood up and asked, “Mr. Ingersoll, is this orange sweet or sour?” In a dismissive tone, Ingersoll responded, “How can I tell if that orange is sweet or sour unless I have tasted it?” The man replied, “Neither can you judge the Christian faith until you have tasted it.”

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord, that you have given us the gift of faith by which we can taste your goodness. Let us savor the sweet flavor of your love, mercy and grace, and share it with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Tuesday, March 5, 2019

“Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.” James 3:4-5

With the tongue we can enjoy the sense of taste. We can enjoy the flavor of food and drink.

The tongue also enables speech, making it possible for us to form words and communicate with others. Herein lies the responsibility to use our tongues to lift up, not to tear down; to build unity, not incite division. The apostle James compares the tongue to a ship’s rudder. A rudder is only a small part of a ship, yet it controls the direction the ship moves in. In like manner, the tongue, though a small part of the body, can control or drive the rest of the body. In other words, what we say will tend to direct our actions. If we speak words of understanding, empathy, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the like, our actions toward others will affect what we say. Conversely, if we speak words of anger, blame, resentment, prejudice, unkindness, and so forth, our actions toward others will manifest our words. Let us be mindful of the power of words and of the tongue to not only guide and steer our lives, but to affect the lives of others.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of the tongue that enables taste and speech. Help us to use it wisely and sensitively that it may convey your grace in all human interactions. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Wednesday, March 6, 2019

“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.” James 1:19-20

In the present context of a society that is so painfully divided in viewpoints and temperaments, it seems to me that this is an ideal time to hear again and take to heart the words of the apostle James. James is the first of the “catholic” or “universal” epistles in the New Testament, followed by the letters of Peter, John and Jude. Unlike most of Paul’s epistles that were written to specific churches Paul had founded, the afore-named epistles were written to all Christians everywhere in the newly-created church. The letter of James was intended to provide first-century Christians with instruction in godly behavior. In the first chapter of his epistle, James encourages Christians to listen carefully to one another and to act on what they hear.

He writes, *“let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.”* This is a good example of how the Bible is a living word. James’ advice is just as relevant and applicable in our day as it was 2,000 years ago. To put it in anatomical terms, let the ears do their job before the tongue goes into action. We need to put James’ words of encouragement to work not only in public forums, but in small groups and one-to-one conversations in the community, in the workplace, in the school, in families, in marriages, in communication between parents and children. If we would apply that principle more often, there would be less anger, less conflict, less misunderstanding and misinformation.

Let us pray. *Creator God, teach us anew that the sense of hearing needs to take precedence over the function of speaking. Help us to listen with understanding and sensitivity before engaging in speech and expressing our views. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*



Thursday, March 7, 2019

“For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies.” “How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

- James 3:2-3, 5b-6

James uses two metaphors to illustrate the potentially destructive power of the tongue and the need to exercise self-control in speech. The reins by which a rider controls a horse are attached to a bit. The bit goes in the horse’s mouth and presses down on the tongue. With the tongue under control, the rider can make the horse do pretty much whatever he wants. James seems to be saying that controlling the tongue is the first step in controlling the behavior of the body. In the next metaphor, James compares the tongue to a flame that ignites a forest fire. Forest fires, like those that devastated California last year, often start from a single match, a flick of a cigarette, or an unattended or improperly doused campfire. In the same way, a single word, or a few words expressed in anger or criticism, can start a firestorm of words and actions that can have a

destructive effect on relationships, in communities, or in the church. Evidently, James was concerned about the adverse effect unbridled tongues and resulting behavior was having on the church right from the beginning. What seemed to concern James is that he saw all kinds of ideas and words being harbored and expressed by supposedly religious people that were counter to Christianity. He believed that you cannot separate your religion from your daily life.

Your religion must condition your lifestyle, your faith must determine your works, your words must be lived out in right actions.

Let us pray. *God of mercy and kindness, help us to be mindful of the impact of our words. Inspire us to speak words that build up, not tear down; that build bridges, not walls. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Friday, March 8, 2019

"With [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing." James 3:9-10a

An old rabbi once said, "God gave us two ears and only one tongue because it is twice as important to listen as it is to speak." He added, "The ears are open and exposed, but the tongue is walled in behind the teeth." However, we have developed the tongue to such an extent that it more than matches the two ears we possess. Now, more than ever before, it seems, we can see evidence of the old adage, "words have consequences." Taking to heart what James is saying, we ought to consider the consequences our words can have before we speak. Especially in this age of digital communication, we ought to consider how our words—spoken, texted or tweeted—can affect our lives and the lives of others. Let us follow the example of our Lord Jesus who listened with compassion and understanding to the questions people asked him and to the cries of human need. In words and actions, Jesus reached into their lives to renew them, redeem them, and uplift them. Let us be mindful that in all our communications we speak as follows of Jesus. Let our words reflect his spirit.

Let us pray. *Lord Jesus, you speak to us as you listen to us, always sensitive to our needs as well as our potential. Help us to communicate with others in words, tone and temperament that are a reflection of you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Saturday, March 9, 2019

“Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.” “The prayer of faith will save the sick...confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

- James 5:13, 15a, 16

This week I have written about the function of the ears and the tongue, that is, the senses of hearing and speech. Let's apply this to our communication with God in worship.

In worship, we speak and God listens. We confess our sins, ask for forgiveness, sing God's praises in hymns and liturgy, seek God's mercy in the Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”), declare what we believe in the creeds, and pray for ourselves and others. In reply, God speaks to us in the absolution where he assures us that he has listened to our humble and heartfelt confession with a loving and sensitive heart and graciously offers us forgiveness; in the reading of scripture where he gives direction to our lives; in the sermon that relates his words to our contemporary situation; in Holy Communion where he comes to us personally and intimately and offers us his redeeming grace; in the benediction where he bestows his blessing on us. As we gather with our congregational families for worship, let us employ all our senses, especially hearing and speaking, that, individually and corporately, we may gain and share the fullest blessing of our communication with God and God's people.

Let us pray. *Gracious Heavenly Father, draw us together as your people and draw us into an intimate and fulfilling conversation with you, as we open our ears to your word and open our mouths to your praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

