

**Text: James 3:1-12**  
**Occasion: Pentecost 17**  
**Date: September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

### **“Small But So Powerful”**

The text for my message this morning comes from our Epistle Reading in particular verse 5, **“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.”**

The story is told of a seminary professor who asked his fourth year class to do something the students thought was odd and silly. In a youth ministry class filled with men studying for their Masters of Divinity, the professor gave each student a tube of toothpaste, a paper plate, and a toothpick. He then proceeded to tell them to empty the tube onto the plate. After they did what that we were supposed to do, he told them to now put the toothpaste back into the tube using the toothpick. You can imagine how surprised they were for they knew it was impossible to put the toothpaste back in the tube. After they all tried and failed the professor explained the purpose of the exercise. He had them do this to show that anytime we speak we can't put the words we speak back into

our mouths. So we need to be careful what we say!

As James said our tongue is a very small part of our bodies but it can do a whole lot of damage. He likens it to forest fire started by a small fire. Think about some of the things that you have said over your lifetime...have you said things that at the time you didn't see being that big of a problem but shortly after you realized they were really hurtful? What about those times when maybe somebody said something in passing to you and you couldn't get those words out of your head? The small tongue can easily create havoc in our lives or the lives of others. But on the other hand we can say words that lift up people and help them in their times of need.

The rest of my time this morning I want us to look at the type of words we speak and think about the fact that once we say something we can't take it back just as you can't put toothpaste back in the tube.

The words that we speak are powerful. Sometimes we realize that and at other times we don't. What our tongue says can be harmful to others. This is especially common among our youth. If you just google

teenage suicide because of bullying you will see countless teenagers who have committed suicide from being bullied in school or online. As you read the stories your heart will just break and you will see the common theme is the hurt these youths felt because of the words that were being spoken to them. We might even not even think what we say is that bad. But we never know what we speak affects a person. It goes to show the words that we speak really have power. That person might just dwell on their words and they might harm themselves or harm others. It's not just teenagers who commit suicide. It's people of all ages. In 2017 suicide was the 9<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in Canada. Nearly 4,000 people took their life that year. I can't say that all of those are caused by what people say, but I'm certain there are a lot caused by the words spoken.

Last week I saw somebody post a picture with the following on it: **“Be careful with your words. Once they are said, they can only be forgiven, not forgotten.”** None of us want the words that we can't get back to cause hurt in the lives of other people no matter who well we know them.

Instead of saying words that are hurtful, let's use words that encourage others. There is already a lot of negativity in the world today without us adding to it by what we say. Paul encourages us to do this in his first letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote, **“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”** You would be amazed how much words of encouragement mean to a person. The words of encouragement we speak are words we are glad to never get back. The person that hears them can find comfort in them in times of need. It's not just words of encouragement but words of love. As we let people know that we love them they will know that there are people out there that care for them. It will make a difference in their lives.

What we say or don't say could be just as important. We have so many more opportunities to share the Gospel with people. Just think about all the new technology that we have to communicate with people or just think about how many people you run into on a daily basis that you have the ability to share the Gospel with. If we go back to toothpaste analogy do you want to look back on your life and think that you left

opportunities to share the Gospel in the tube, so to speak? There are many people out there who don't know what Jesus has done for them or they don't understand who Jesus truly was. As Christians we are called to proclaim Christ crucified and risen to and teach those who don't know of Him.

I'm reminded of the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian in Acts. Phillip was just out and about and saw the Ethiopian man who was confused by what he was reading in Isaiah. Phillip took time to explain to Him about how Jesus was the "**Suffering Servant.**" Those words were powerful for the Ethiopian. As soon as he understood he wanted to be baptized and that's exactly what happened.

**Words are powerful.** There are no words more powerful or important than that of John 3:16, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.**" That is the Gospel nutshell and many people have those words memorized. That message is something we are to share. Words that can lead people away from taking their own life, but

more importantly words can give the gift of eternal life. When we share those words and the Holy Spirit works faith in that person it will give that person the gift of salvation.

Think about this. We have been averaging around 90 people the past month or so. If each person that worships each week shared the Gospel message with just 10 people we would be sharing it with nearly 900 people. How amazing would that be! And if you share it with more than 10, that number will just soar!

It is my constant prayer that you would share that message whether you speak it face to face with someone, say it over the phone, text it, or put it up on social media. Even if you share it with someone who already knows, it will serve as a reminder that we have a God who was willing to go to hell for us so that we wouldn't have to. And you never know your witness might be the one that changes that person's life for all eternity! We might not know in this lifetime if it made a difference for that person but we can plant that seed and pray that the Holy Spirit grabs hold and waters it so it can grow into that faith that gives eternal life!

The words that we speak are no different than when you get toothpaste out of the tube, you can't get them back. Once they are out, they are out. So the question is what type of words are you going to say? Are you going to discourage and hurt others with your words? Or are you going to encourage, uplift, and most importantly, say life giving words to the people you come in contact with? It's those life giving words about what our Lord and Savior that truly matter. I know that I don't want nor do any of you want to look back at your life and think of the missed opportunities to share the Gospel message. Instead we want to look back and see how, by God's grace, we provided a great witness for our Lord and Savior. Amen.