

Anthon UMC, Sept 16, '18, James 3:1-12, "Did He Really Say That?"

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"Did he really say that?" We are given two scriptures this morning where people are doing a double take on what was said by another. Ever have that happen where you just couldn't believe something unexpected, was said to you? "Say what?" The first double take situation Andrea read from the Gospel of Mark was where we heard Jesus' telling the disciples he was going to suffer a terrible death, die and rise again. Peter must have been thinking, "Did he really say that?" And Peter rebukes Jesus right on the spot! And Jesus, knowing that suffering for our sins was the reason he came to this earth had to resist the temptation of taking the easy road. He publicly, and said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan!" Satan? That's some pretty strong name calling there, Jesus, did you really say that? But Jesus recognized from whom Peter's rebuke really came, and he couldn't let this misunderstanding of His purpose for coming spread among all the rest of the disciples. Poor Peter, sometimes you wish you had bitten your tongue before speaking of what you don't understand. Peter surely should have, so Jesus pretty much bit it for him.

And then in the Epistle of James, we hear another statement that gives us a double take. James says, "Not many of you should become teachers."

Say what? Did he really say that? At first glance I take offence at that remark. My response would be, "Of course many of you who call yourself, "brothers and sisters," should become teachers! If not you, who? If not now, when? If not here, where? Who will teach our children? Who will enable each of us to grow in the Word of God, if not many of you are willing to become teachers?"

It may be that people, now as well as then, listen to the scary words from James warning that those who teach will be held in greater judgment. Judgment! Did he really say that? Aren't we all doing our best? James isn't sure. And James isn't just talking about Sunday School teachers. His words ring true of all who hold any position in Christ's church. Maybe we should all be scared that we aren't doing a good enough job at all such stuff; like singing in the choir, preaching, or being a Trustee, mowing the lawn and don't forget those of us vacuuming the church floors, doing the dishes, baking pies for and working at the church supper, etc. We are to consider these as serious a calling as teaching the church children and we are to say, "Yes!" to all worthy calls we can, that God has given us the gifts to perform.

God desires to give us a sense that He has called us to whatever we are doing in his name, and we are not to treat any tasks lightly, for all the works we do are a witness to our faith. James is one who believes passionately that faith without works is dead. In James eyes, a passive faith is no faith at all. I agree with him on that one.

. If we are not willing to take our turn to help steer our church, whatever may be the calling, we may find that our church is not in existence in the future. With all the negative speaking about God and the church going on in the world, being the church takes a lot of commitment these days.

Now If you were considering putting your name down on that insert that was handed out the last couple of Sundays about sharing a talent in this coming year, and James words have scared you, you need to take heart, for your church's survival depends on you too much for you to take the easy road. If we are a people choosing to take that easy road, it is then that we should all be scared, for what we love may crumble if we do not do the team work to help hold it up for God, ourselves, others and especially the children.

What you say to a child or what may have been said to you as a child can ring in your ears forever. An experience with a teacher happened to me

in public school a great many years ago and I remember the power in this teacher's words to this day. I was in middle school and we had to read a book and give a book report on that book, reading the report out loud before the whole class. I was a country girl, not bold to speak out loud in class by any means, but I had written my report on the classic, "Little Women" which I loved reading. On that morning when it was my turn, for once I was happy to share my report before others as I thought it had turned out pretty good. After I finished, the teacher merely said in front of everyone, "I don't believe you wrote that yourself. Are you sure you didn't copy it off of the dust cover of the book?" I was embarrassed and tried to show her the book cover, but I don't think she ever believed me. You can crush a child or an adult with a word of discouragement and create doubt about their developing gifts and talents and diminish them. In spite of, or maybe because of her criticism, my gift with words kept popping out through the years until, here I am boldly speaking them before you, still with fear and trembling, under the awesome weight that one day I will be held responsible for standing in God's house having not spoken the truth of the word to you boldly enough. It's tricky ground to stand upon, to know when you are speaking boldly enough to effectively change things for good or when you are speaking too boldly and the troops rebel. I apologize to any

of you to whom my words of leadership have caused you to think, “Did she really say that?” I’ve never claimed to be perfect, and I know I fall far short in sharing what God would have me say and how it’s said, for I confess my best can never be perfect enough.

But James softens his words by going on to say, “For all of us make many mistakes.” Boy isn’t that the truth, but the saving grace for us is that God forgives the mistakes of those who come to him in repentance and ask his help to continue to grow and learn, from those willing to inspire and teach one another it is necessary to receive correction being willing to forgive others. God forgave Peter for his slip of the tongue. That’s where we all are in serving God, He forgiving our slips and our continuing to do our best to serve. God knows us too well to expect perfection, but James does say that **if** we can be perfect in speaking, we can keep our whole selves in check. Wouldn’t that be an amazing feat?

James writes that “anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect.” Wow! He goes on to say that If anyone here can keep from speaking wrongly, they’ve got their whole life under control. Wow! In my mind, that person is next to Jesus himself. The truth is that all of us speak without thinking. You don’t always have the luxury of being able to meditate on every word before it comes out of your mouth. And it’s worth mentioning

that if your ears are not willing to listen to another's words it can also cause pain and conflict. Have you ever just hurt someone's feeling by **not** listening to the words they are trying to share with you?

A story is told of a family that went into a restaurant. The waitress walked up and looking at the young boy said, "What will it be?" The boy eagerly shouted back, "I'll take a hamburger, French fries and a chocolate shake." The mother immediately interrupted, "Oh that's not what he wants. He'll take the roast beef, a baked potato, and a glass of milk." Much to the surprise of both the mother and the boy, the waitress completely ignored her and again asked the boy, "And what do you want on that hamburger?" The boy shouted back, "Ketchup, lots of ketchup." And what kind of shake?" "Make it chocolate." The boy then turned to his parents with a big smile on his face and said, "Say, isn't she something, she thinks I'm real."

When we treat other people as if their words count, they are assured that they are real to us. Respecting our children's words especially, helps them respect us and our words.

Now James did not speak the warning about how we use our words only to those who teach, but to all of us, for we all are speaking in some way. Our words show the world whether we love God and others or

whether we do not. For a lesson, James puts before several illustrations about how small things can be used to control great things, such as a bridle in horse's mouth can bring its whole body into obedience. I always thought about how painful it would be to have to be controlled by a bridle in my mouth and I determined early on, that I would try to let God control me the easy way, with his word. But when I slip up, even today, I can almost feel the bridle spiritually jerking me to go another way.

I kind of like how our own plucky John Wesley responded to criticism back in the 1700s. He was considered a rather spiffy dresser. One Sunday morning he wore a bow tie that had long ribbons that hung downward. After the sermon was over a lady walked up to him and said, "Brother Wesley, are you open to some criticism?"

He said, "I guess so. What would you like to criticize?" She said, "The ribbons on your tie are entirely too long and inappropriate for a man of God." And she took out her scissors and cut them off. A hush fell over the people standing there as Wesley calmly asked, "Now may I borrow the scissors for a moment? As she handed them to him, he said, "Ma'am, are you open to some criticism?"

She answered, "Well, I suppose I am." He said, "All right then, please stick out our tongue." I I'm sure this altercation went no further, but we must know and understand that our words do lead to resulting actions that we may not want to experience.

James also speaks of the tongue being like the rudder of a ship, making the ship obey the captain's desire where it is to go. Oh, that we were so easily steered in the right direction rather than one that can cause the ships we are trying to guide to crash. Our personal Titanics of which we are so proud, but which can crash into an iceberg when our watchman is sleeping on his watch. (much like when our mouth is unattended), can be our marriage, our home, our church, our relationships. Some people get upset and jump ship when the iceberg problems of life hit and some innocent passengers can get thrown overboard, and not always can these be retrieved or rescued back into our eternal lifeboat.

In our Gospel lesson of today back in the book of Mark. Jesus is asking his disciples who people say he is and Peter, the man who spouts out the best and worst of words says boldly, "You are the Messiah!" Did he really say that? Yes, and he should have held his tongue before correcting Jesus later. Recognizing Jesus' Messiahship is the pivotal truth that Jesus has been waiting to hear come from the lips of his disciples. The redeeming fire

of God's Spirit is hinged on this truth. Jesus is the Messiah. The good news is that Peter would grow and learn from hearing Jesus' words to him and become one of the greatest teachers of them all.

To know the heart of God, one must keep in the word of God, rather than keeping in the word of the world. One must meditate on the world with prayer for discernment so that the true meaning for each one of us might be made clear. The word is a living thing, sharper than a two-edged sword meant to bring the truth to you, whether it brings it in pain or in joy, it is for your education and your spiritual growth. "Not many should become teachers my brothers and sisters." James said that. But in the ways you of serve God you are none the less teaching by your actions. Did I just say that? Yes, I did!