

# Church of the Lutheran Confession's Ministry By Mail

*"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17*

## 18th Sunday of Trinity

Volume 67, Number 44



### Print Sermons Online

<http://ministrybymail.clclutheran.org/current.html>

### Audio Sermons

[podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/ministrybymail](https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/ministrybymail)



### Scripture Readings

Numbers 12:1-15; Luke 6:6-11

### Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941)

#360 | #294 | #416 | #400 V:1, 3, 5, 6



### Prayer of the Day

*Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*



### Sermon Text

(Jas. 3:6-18 ESV) "And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

## Theme

### **Pray for Heavenly Wisdom! It affects our words and our works**

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, grace and peace be with you all in His name,

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words...” You know how it goes. “Words will never hurt me.” This is what we were taught as children when the playground bully would make fun of us. Our mothers would remind us, “Sticks and stones!” -- comforting us that words couldn’t really do us any harm.

While words can’t break our bones, I think we all have learned the hard way that words can and do hurt. Harsh words from a spouse can severely damage a marriage. Belittling words from a parent can crush a child’s emotions. The words of a powerful speaker can rile up a crowd to action – either for good or for evil. The words of the Sanhedrin on Good Friday turned the crowd against Jesus and convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus. Right now, our nation is embroiled in a struggle over words. Should speech be censored? What is acceptable speech, and what is hate speech?

While I don’t want to navigate that philosophical debate, I do want to direct you to God’s Word. He who created the mouth to speak does have something to say about words. Let us pray for heavenly wisdom which will affect our words and our works as we hear the God-breathed words of James, chapter three, verses six through eighteen:

The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

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The book of James was written to Christian believers – those who were already following Jesus. And some of the themes of his letter come together in our verses. James writes to the Christians about wisdom, words, and works. Regarding wisdom he writes in chapter 1, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) James tells us to pray for wisdom. A few verses later in chapter 1 he writes about our words: “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19) And James writes a great deal about our works – how our works demonstrate the faith that is in our hearts.

Those themes come together in our verses from chapter 3. While it is true that the words that come out of someone’s mouth can’t physically hurt us, that doesn’t mean words don’t hurt us in other ways. Look at how James describes the tongue, this little organ in your mouth which allows you to form sounds and speak words. James calls it “a fire” in verse 6 and in verse 9, “a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” You know the truth of this from your own experience. When is the last time you said something that

sparked a fiery response? When is the last time a relationship was poisoned because of something someone said?

The Bible is full of examples that prove this truth. The devil used words to turn Eve against the will of God. Absalom used words to turn a nation against his father, King David. The lying words of Jezebel resulted in godly Naboth being stoned to death.

This morning, we heard how Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother, had that selfish ambition and jealousy in their hearts that James warns us about. Their words showed their lack of wisdom. They said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Numbers 12:2) This did not build up the fellowship of the Israelites, but divided them. The LORD's anger was kindled against Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Him and His faithful servant Moses. Indeed, the tongue is a fire and deadly poison.

As James talks about our tongue, he talks about all the animals humans have been able to tame. Huge elephants have been trained to give rides to people and do circus tricks. Killer whales are taught to jump out of the water and splash crowds at Sea World. We can pet tarantulas and charm serpents. Yet, James writes, "no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

How about you? Have you been able to tame your tongue? Even though you knew your parents loved you, your sinful, selfish emotions took control of your tongue as you shouted, "I hate you!" Words brought your wife to tears or caused your husband to turn his back and walk away. Relationships at church went cold after words that were spoken.

When an unbeliever uses evil, poisonous words, it doesn't surprise us. But, you and I, we are the redeemed of God! We are children of the heavenly Father! We've used our mouths to state divine, heavenly truths about the Holy Trinity. But no sooner do we leave God's house than something fiery, poisonous, or salty comes out of our mouth. Take a look at verses 9 and 10: "With it (the tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." Amen, James. It shouldn't be this way...and yet it is.

As we struggle with fiery, poisonous words that come out of our mouth, words that reveal selfish ambition and jealousy, words that cause disorder, we realize just how much help we need. We confess with Isaiah, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5) Woe to us. We are lost. We are people with unclean lips.

But do you remember what God did after Isaiah realized this? An angel took a burning coal from the altar of sacrifice and touched Isaiah's mouth, saying, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:7)

My fellow sinners with unclean lips, by the blood of the Son of God, shed on the altar of the cross, your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. You are forgiven for the unclean words that have come out of your mouth.

Furthermore, think of all that the Bible says about the words of Jesus' mouth. Luke writes that when Jesus spoke, "all...marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth." (Luke 4:22) Jesus speaks gracious words that cause us to marvel. When fiery, poisonous, hellish words were spoken against Jesus, He was silent, like a lamb at the slaughterhouse. Peter writes, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:22-23) Jesus silently endured the wrath of God and the wrath of man, suffering for the sins of our lips.

Hearing this about our Savior, let us pray for heavenly wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to take information and use it in a way that is beneficial to others. Listen to how James describes heavenly

wisdom in verse 17: it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17) Rather than speaking words that divide and cause strife, heavenly wisdom moves us to bring forth a harvest of peace.

We are in great need of this heavenly wisdom at home, at church, and in society, but how do we get it? Think of the disciples – especially Peter. The tongue of Peter gave Jesus the satanic suggestion that He should not die on the cross. When the pressure was on, Peter’s lips spoke words of denial and cursing. But what do we see with this same Peter some 50 days later? On Pentecost, Peter is speaking of the wonderful works of God. The next time Peter stood before the very men who called for Christ to be crucified and told Peter to stop speaking about Jesus, listen to the words that came out of Peter’s mouth to them: “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20

So what made this drastic change in such a short period of time? First, the resurrected Jesus Christ spoke words of love and forgiveness to Peter. Then on Pentecost, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, changed the words of Peter.

This is the same way God gives you heavenly wisdom – by His Spirit working through His Gospel. Today, His Word has convicted us of sinful words and silenced us. But His Word also reveals Jesus who died to save us from those sinful words. This Spirit, working through His Word, is working heavenly wisdom in you. Look at verses 17 and 18 and consider how now you want to speak words that will foster peace among your fellow believers. You want to speak gentle words to your spouse and children. You are open to reason and direction from the Spirit and His Word, and from your fellow believer. Knowing how God had mercy on you, a person with unclean lips, you want to speak words of mercy to those who don’t deserve it. Now you want to speak words that are impartial and sincere. This is the wisdom from above which is at work in you. The Holy Spirit is using the good news of Jesus Christ to move you to reflect heavenly wisdom in your words and your works.

In our nation over the last several years there has been a great debate about words. While others debate over it, sometimes violently, let us pray for heavenly wisdom. Open that Book which is full of heavenly wisdom, the Bible, and read it, praying that the Spirit would guide us by His Word so that our words and our works would reflect that heavenly wisdom. May the Lord open our lips that our mouths may declare His praise! Amen.

**Pastor Nathan J. Pfeiffer**

*Berea Ev. Lutheran Church Inver Grove Heights, MN*