

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Easter People are Called to Flourish

Epistle Lesson

James 3:7-10,15-18 (NRSVUE)

⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth comes a blessing and a curse. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

¹⁵This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week, as we continue to work through the book of James, we focus on chapter three. The first sentence of this chapter is, “Not many of you should become teachers.” Wow. Leave it to James to just come right out and say it! His point is that those who teach must be aware of how their words impact their students, and that it is very hard for people to “tame the tongue” in a way that is helpful. In fact, James says that if someone is trying to teach who isn’t really called to teach, then harm can be done. “How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire.”

James reminds us that we, as a species have tamed every beast. We have built skyscrapers. We have put a person on the moon. And yet, we cannot tame the tongue. We cannot seem to speak to one another according to the royal law. And this is why James says that not everyone is called to be a teacher. Not everyone is called to the same thing. One should assess their ability to hold their tongue or to speak according to the royal law, while discerning their calling.

James is all about doing ... being a “doer of the word.” And we are each called to do some part of the overall work. We each have our particularities, and we are to put them to use in service to the overall mission. It becomes, then, a matter of discernment. What gifts do I have? How can those particular gifts be given as a way to bring my faith to life? Where will my speech, my works, my faith be of best use.

This kind of discernment can be difficult for some. (And it is easier for others.) Some may feel a pressure to “get it right” or even feel envious of someone who has discerned and is flourishing in their own particular call. But there is no pressure; there is just grace. Vocational discernment has no timeline.

Another difficulty lies in the idea that some callings are “higher” or “better” than others. Such thinking may cultivate what James calls “selfish ambition.” Envy and selfish ambition foment disorder among people, and can do great harm to relationships within the community. We are

not in competition with one another for who has the better, higher calling. Christian vocation has no hierarchy.

Often we hear the phrase, "Bloom where you are planted," used as a metaphor to encourage someone to flourish in whatever circumstances they find themselves. And the metaphor makes a good point ... and sometimes flowers can't bloom where they are planted. Sometimes the soil isn't conducive to bearing fruit, or there isn't enough light, or for some other reason the plant just doesn't do well. Someone with a green thumb will know when the time comes to move the plant to a new pot. And many times that's all it takes for that plant to bear fruit.

It's the same when we are trying to discern God's call in our lives. Sometimes, you have to try out a new "pot" to see if you bloom there. Manchester UMC has so, so many opportunities for people to find a way to flourish in our various callings. And we have an entire community of people around us to help us in that discernment.

So watch your tongue. Listen for where it encourages instead of cuts down. Listen for where it speaks truthfully. Listen for where it lifts up. Listen for the royal law, on the curve of your lips and the tip of your tongue.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there someone you can "set ablaze" with just a sentence? What keeps you from doing so? When have you harmed another with your words?
2. Pastor, activist and hymn writer William James wrote, "Easter People, raise your voices,
3. sounds of heaven in earth should ring!" Where do you hear the sounds of heaven? Where do you hear the sounds of hell?
4. If "sounds of heaven in earth should ring" how is God using you to add to the sounds of heaven, on earth?
5. Do you ever feel ill-equipped in your calling? Do you have a clear calling?

Prayer

Resurrected God, you have called us together to add our voice to your chorus. Let our voices be one of harmony. Teach our tongues to speak slowly. Teach our hearts to love tenderly. Bless the body, and all of its parts. Move us to support the calling of one another, your vision for our church and for the world. **Amen.**

*"Easter People, raise your voices,
sounds of heaven in earth should ring!"
– William M. James*