

**MARK 8:27-34**

*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'*

*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'*

**James 3:1-17 (NRSV)**

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 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. 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.*

*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. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it 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. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.*

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But 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.*

**The Word of the Lord...**

Oh the things we say...

In a grocery store with one of my friends we were checking out when the person behind us said to the grocery clerk, "Oh how exciting, when's the baby due?"

It was a total train wreck that you could see coming, but couldn't get out of the way. A glare from the clerk was all the woman needed to know that there was no baby on the way and so she tried to fix it, "Oh... I mean... yes... well clearly you are just so vital and glowing and but of course... now I can see you're too old to be pregnant...."

Then she tried to dig out of THAT hole and my friend suddenly snapped to attention, turned to her – a COMPLETE stranger - and said, "Oh my gosh, you HAVE to stop talking!"

So far I have not fallen into that particular trap, but with a mouth as big as mine I have had my share. Usually in an attempt to be funny or clever I end up saying something that at best is awkward and at worst is hurtful to the one who hears it. Brutal.

One of my favorite quotes is from Mark Twain, "It is better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than to open it and remove all doubt." Great quote... I rarely live by.

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The thing is... it's not like I want to be that person who says stupid things because she can't keep her mouth shut. I would love to be that introspective, seemingly learned person in the back of the room who quietly nods her head and every once in awhile interjects something incredibly brilliant into the conversation.

I know that person... and I am not her. And if you're not that person either and like me, you are just doing your best to live a faithful life and be who it is God is calling you to be... then I have good news. We are not alone not just in the here and now but in Scripture... because we've got Peter.

God bless him.

In a story repeated in three out of four of the Gospels, Peter has this brilliant, lucid moment where he 100% gets who Jesus is and he proclaims it: *(Jesus) asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.'*

He was the first disciple to fully understand and in the Gospel of Mark it is an absolute turning point. Peter gets it! And then like the imperfect human he is... suddenly he doesn't get it and worse... he opens his mouth and removes all doubt.

Jesus starts to describe to all of them what it means to be the Messiah and in Peter's defense, no wonder he thinks Jesus has it all wrong. Peter is thinking King of the Jews – royalty and power. Jesus knows it means suffering and rejection and eventually death. And so Peter – like many of us would probably do, having just been given the confidence boost of giving the right answer – attempts to correct and maybe even protect Jesus from himself.

Peter has placed himself on a pedestal of thinking he knows more and he comes crashing down when Jesus compares him to Satan: *Get behind me... For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

Satan? Ouch...

And yet 6 days later the Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus takes Peter up a high mountain where he witnesses the transfiguration. And although he will have his low moments of misunderstandings and even denial, the man ends up standing so tall in his faith that he is considered a cornerstone of the church.

Not bad for a guy whose tongue caused so many fires.

This in no way means we shouldn't heed James warning, you'd have to be a fool to think words cannot hurt and do serious damage. The reason they can do so is because of their power and influence. But rightly proclaimed the power and influence of words can shape and form us in positive ways.

For example I look to the rhythm of our own worship. What words do we allow to sink in while others we dismiss? How many of us take every word of the confession to heart and yet refuse to let the power of grace and forgiveness offered to us Sunday after Sunday permeate our stubborn malaise.

Conversely, how many of us look at the words of the confession and think, "Well, I'm not that bad. Maybe I'll have sins next week."

Most Sundays we declare what it is we believe... what do those words mean? Why do we believe in the holy, catholic church... I mean, I know they exist because I see them parking over here...

Actually, in this case 'catholic' means universal. And 'the quick' means 'the living'.

We confess and declare forgiveness because it shapes who we are as beloved children of God.  
We declare our faith because it shapes who we are as Christians.  
We pray together because it shapes who we are as a community of faith.

But too often these are only Sunday words.

Too often during the rest of the week when it comes to our faith we are tongue-tied.

The Word of God – Scripture and Prayer – is not a Sunday only event. If our words shape us and only for an hour or two are we surrounded by words of faith, how much harder – if not impossible – will it be to be shaped into people of faith?

Prayer at the dinner table is not just faithful, it's essential.  
Scripture in the home is not just essential, it's fruitful.

"In Christian worship the people of God hear the Word proclaimed, receive the Word enacted in Sacrament, discover the Word in the world and are sent to follow the Word into the world<sup>1</sup>."

Please don't leave the Word here.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II - Book of Order. W-1.1004.*