

Pentecost 12
August 16, 2015

“A Healthy Tongue for Jesus”

EPHESIANS 4:29-5:2

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. ^{5:1} Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Inside of your mouth you have a tongue. It helps you taste food. It can move food around in your mouth as you are chewing and helps you swallow your food. It can detect the smallest grain of sand in your mouth or the fish bone that you are about to swallow that might get stuck in your throat. The tongue also helps you form the words that come out of your mouth.

Think of how many words your tongue helped you speak this past week. Some of these words were good words that encouraged and helped other people. Other words may have been bad words that hurt people or didn't give them the love and support they needed.

For Christians who are part of the body of Christ, the tongue is a very important tool for building each other in Christ and not tearing each other down. Let's take a closer look at these words that Paul wrote from a prison in Rome to the dear Christians in Corinth. These words encourage us to have "Healthy Tongues for Jesus" because of what Jesus has done for us.

It is hard to have a healthy tongue

It is hard to have a healthy tongue for Jesus because what comes out of our mouths in the form of words is controlled by what is in the heart. "Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helping for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." The word for unwholesome talk could also be translated as "rotten." You would think that since we are new people in Christ there would be no rotten words that ever come from our mouths. But we also know that we have sinful flesh or a sinful nature still inside of us that can suddenly cause us to say things that hurt other people rather than help them.

Every day people all over the world use their tongues to speak words that are rotten and evil, words that hurt and destroy other people. They use their tongues to curse and swear. They use their tongues to say bad words that make fun of God's creation and God's gift of sex. One singer, once a cute young star on Disney, has now become infamous for sticking her tongue out when her picture is taken. Even worse than sticking her tongue out in an

unwholesome way are the unwholesome words that constantly pour forth from her mouth.

For some people every other word from their mouths is a four letter word. Romans 3 says, "Their throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." There is not a human being here on this earth who has not said something rotten with their mouth and tongue. We all are desperately in need of perfection and forgiveness and pardon for our sins of the tongue which can only be found in Jesus.

Bad words are not just found out in the street, or in the prisons, or in the songs of certain rappers. Bad words are even spoken by Christians who are part of the body of Christ. Here is a Christian man who comes home from work stressed out and agitated. Instead of kicking the dog he takes out his frustration or anger against his wife. Or just as bad he does not give his wife the encouraging words that she needs, and she does not give encouraging words to her husband. Remember the words from "Home, Home on the Range." "And never is heard, a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day." See the child who carries the scars of bad and hurtful words into adulthood and they are never forgotten. If we could sing, "never is heard a discouraging word."

Because you are a new people in Christ you have the privilege of building each other up in Christ. Last week we heard how important it is to speak the truth in love to other members of the body of Christ. You are called to be royal priests in the kingdom of God who show forth God's praises not just to the unbelieving world but other members of the body of Christ. God forbid that my tongue or your tongue would ever teach God's Word incorrectly and lead people away from Christ. God forbid that we might speak something unloving to a fellow member of the body of Christ that leads them to stray away from hearing God's Word and receiving the Holy Sacrament. Fellow believers need the good words that come from a heart that loves Jesus.

We don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit with rotten words from our lives or rotten actions from our lives. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Angry and harsh words come from a heart corrupted by sin. Such anger and bitterness grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter who teaches and helps us remember every day and every hour and every minute how kind and good Jesus has been to us. The Holy Spirit takes us back to the cross and lets us see a Savior who prayed for us when he said, "Father forgive them.." Your body is the temple or dwelling of the Holy Spirit. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we open rooms in our temple where we tolerate anger and malice and bitterness.

Imagine for a moment a young couple buys a new home and then rents out a room to pay the mortgage. The problem is the person who rents the room is not clean. He never showers. He never washes his clothes. He eats food in the room and throws the garbage under the bed. In only a few weeks, or days, there is a terrible stench coming out of the room that permeates the whole house. Open up a room in your heart for anger and malice and bitterness and this will smell up your life. Bitter and angry and rotten words will come forth from your mouth. The tongue will not be able to stop these bad words.

How can we use our tongues in a good way? Listen to the prisoner in Rome as he speaks to his beloved people in Ephesus. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Be kind. Be compassionate. The word for compassion can be literally translated as having good bowels or a good stomach. The King James Version uses the words, "bowels of mercy." Where do we feel love and compassion for people? We say it is in the heart. But when we really feel something intensely we feel it in our stomach. I want my feelings and love and kindness for other people, especially members of the body of Christ, to be so strong they make me feel it right here in my stomach. The Samaritan had pity or compassion for a Jewish man who had been robbed, beaten and left for dead. I want that same compassion for fellow Christians to constantly flourish and expand in my life, and so do you. So much compassion and love is shown by the words we speak.

What example do we have for showing compassion? It is the example of our God who was so compassionate for us that he forgave us of our sin in Christ. He had Jesus his Son nailed to a cross for us. He had his Son become sin for us. He had him punished in our place. The words of 1 John 3 are so true. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God." How can I not have compassion for my fellow Christians when I think of how much compassion and love my Father has shown to both of us in Christ his Son? As hard as it is to have a healthy tongue, we can use our tongues in the right way but only through Jesus.

It is possible to have a healthy tongue through Jesus

The standards for having a healthy tongue are so high. Paul says, "Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children." Do you want an example for controlling your tongue and using it to help others instead of hurting them, then look at the example of your God? Imitate him. The word for imitate comes from the Greek word "mimeo." The words imitate, mimic, or mime are all related to this. Have you ever had a mime mimic you in public in front of lots of people? I have. The more you try to ignore them the more they make a fool of you. They are so good at mimicking you.

I want to be good at mimicking my God in the way I treat other people and show them kindness. God's standard is perfection. God is perfect. How can I ever begin to be like God in the way he shows kindness and love with the words that come out of my tongue? There is not a no win situation. As Paul said so confidently when it came to overcoming grumbling and complaining and being discouraged, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Jesus gives us the strength to overcome the bitterness in the heart and the unkind words that come from our lips.

Paul encourages us to believe that it is possible to live a life of love for Christ even to the point of using our lips and mouths and tongues in a good way instead of a bad way. "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." When Jesus gave his life for us at the cross, he did not offer something rotten and foul smelling to his heavenly Father. Instead he offered a fragrant offering and sacrifice. Every animal that was burnt on the altar in the Old Testament pictured the horrible punishment for sin that Jesus suffered for us at the cross. All that Jesus did for us was pleasing to the heavenly Father. At Jesus' Baptism the Father said, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." In John 12, we hear Jesus pray to his Father, "Father, glorify

your name." Then the Father spoke from heaven and said, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The Father gladly accepted the sacrifice his Son made for us by glorifying him and raising him to life again. It was the Father's way of saying the payment my Son made for you is pleasing, and acceptable and perfect.

Now your life and mine becomes a pleasing living sacrifice for our God. Every word that comes from our mouths is washed clean by Jesus' blood. Every word that comes from our tongues can now be used to glorify God and show kindness to people. And so we pray, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen.