

The Letter of James 2: IT'S ALL ABOUT TONGUES!

James 3:1-10 [MW19-08]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 24 February 2019

If you were asked to give a theme or a title

- for that passage we've just heard from the Letter of James, chapter three what would your suggestion be?

[space for thinking and suggestions]

Yes, indeed - maybe something like, 'The Dangers of the Tongue'

- or 'Beware the Tongue'
- or 'A Little Thing that can do Great Good or Great Harm' ...

I guess there are illustrations of this all around us

- however one that came to mind for me is from a TV programme it seemed tailor-made to highlight all that James is saying ...

Anyone here watch *Coronation Street* ?

- I don't but I was staying with a family who did a couple of years ago and got caught up in a particular series of events
- now there's Kevin and Sally who are married with three girls Kevin runs a garage and Sally works for a Car Dealer
- Sally is having an affair with her boss ... Kevin doesn't know, doesn't suspect but some on the street think something's not quite right

Then there's Tommy who's married to Angela

- Tommy works for Kevin at the garage, Angela and Tommy have a daughter, Katy Katy has just left school but has been in a relationship with a much older man, Martin
- they've had all sorts of ups and downs, not the least of which is Katy's Dad Tommy is dead against her and Martin being together
- now Katy is pregnant, Martin is the father, and they are engaged to be married

So far the usual 'soap opera' stuff

- but then it begins to get even more curly there's a bit of a whisper that Sally, the one having an affair with her boss is up to something no good
- in the pub, Angela, Tommy's wife, overhears Sally talking to a friend about her affair no names are mentioned, but the friend is horrified and tells her she has to stop
- Sally says she can't and why doesn't her friend understand and Sally leaves the pub very upset

Martin, the one with Katy, sees Sally very upset and invites her home for a cup of tea and a chat

- meanwhile Angela goes home and tells her husband, Tommy that Sally, the wife of his boss and mate Kevin, is having an affair
- Sally is seen coming out of Martin's flat Tommy and Angela put two and two together

Tommy punches Martin for being a two-timing scumbag

- and tells his daughter, Katy that her so-called loverboy has been having an affair so Katy storms off and tells poor bewildered Martin what a lying cheat he is
- Tommy convinces Katy that she wouldn't want to have a child to such a person so she has an abortion

Then it comes out that Martin can't be the one Sally is having an affair with

- Katy comes crying and weeping and apologising to Martin but he is having none of it
- distraught, confused and angry Katy leaves the flat sees her father working late at the garage
- she goes in and tells him it's all his fault that her life is mucked up because he got it wrong about Martin and Sally
- Tommy though says it's for the best that she broke up with Martin and she'll thank him for it one day
- Katy gets so angry with what her father is saying that she hits him on the back of the head with a spanner and kills him ...
- then Martin is arrested for the murder ...

All this ... because one person is leading an impure life

- and loose tongues
- James was surely on to it!
listen to verse six from *The Message* translation

A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

James says that the tongue is so small, yet its capacity for destruction is so large

- just like when a bit is placed in the mouth of a horse its whole body can be controlled
- so if we can control our tongues, we can control the whole body but if the tongue is uncontrolled, the whole of life can go awry

Similarly, a rudder is very small compared with the size of a ship

- yet by exerting pressure on that tiny rudder a large ship may be steered and guided to safety
- the tongue is also small yet it can direct the whole course of a person's life

You might have seen some of the scrub fires on TV recently

- it only takes one spark to set all that powerful destruction in motion the tongue is like that spark

James says we have in our bodies something so small and yet so powerful

- it is potentially more destructive than an arrow or even a bullet a hand kills only at close quarters
- an arrow kills at fifty paces, a bullet at three hundred metres the tongue can kill at a hundred kilometres and more!

That's the peril of the tongue

- a person can fend off a blow with the hand
for the striker has to be present
- but someone can drop a malicious word or repeat a scandalous untrue story
about a person they don't even know and who is hundreds of miles away
and cause great harm

You know that saying?

- a rumour travels around the world three times before the truth catches up with it
once a word is spoken, you can't get it back

We live in the twenty-first century

- think of all the advances we have made, the things we can do
we've almost eliminated polio
we can put music and information on a 'memory stick'
we can fly faster than sound
- we have indeed followed up on the command in Genesis 1:28
to bring the earth under control and rule over its creatures
- but still, in spite of all that, with all of our knowledge and our advances
we cannot control the tongue

That's a humbling thought

- in spite of everything, we are no further along
in fact in some ways we have made this lack of 'tongue control' an art form
- think of the advertising industry
and its pervasive use of language to seduce and deceive
- the slippery half-truths of political campaigns
meticulously crafted messages to "sell" a candidate
- and the whole new philosophy of "spin"

James is on about much more than ethics or morality

- more even than telling the truth and walking the talk
James points out something that is at once both serious and sobering
- how it is amazing, astounding, flabbergasting even
that with our tongues we are able to do two completely opposite things
- things which cancel each other out
with our tongues we can bless and we can curse

With our tongues we can bless and we can curse

- we can praise God
and we can hurt those created in God's image
- by our use of the tongue

For James there is something not just wrong, but unnatural about this

- chapter 3, verse 10
Praises and curses come from the same mouth!
My brothers and sisters, this should not happen

Our tongues are a tool to help us give glory to God

- yet so often they do the exact opposite even the disciples were not immune
- remember Peter who said to Jesus, "I'm ready for anything, even to die with you" then with that very same tongue Peter denied even knowing Jesus with oaths and curses

Yet all is not doom and gloom

- yes, that's the way things often are ... however we can guard against it and with the help of the Holy Spirit, control our tongue and use it for blessing
- James wrote:
All of us do many wrong things. But if you can control your tongue, you are mature and able to control your whole body

In this way God's blessings flow

- the awesome power of the tongue, the transformative power of words brings life and laughter, joy and growth

Do any of you remember, have you even heard of Bob Beamon, world record holder in the long jump at the Olympic Games of 1968? Time has a way of blurring the memory of even the great feats of sporting history. Beamon was featured in a commercial promoting the 1984 Olympic Games. In the commercial he turned into the camera and said, "Back in the Olympic Games of 1968, I set a world record in the long jump. At the time, some people said no one would ever jump that far again. Over the years I've enjoyed watching them try, and I'm told who might have a chance of breaking my record. Well there's just one thing I have to say about that ..." Instead of a self-centred wisecrack, Beamon's face softened, and in a sincere, caring manner, he said, "I hope you make it, kid!" Bob Beamon won more goodwill with that one sentence than he had ever won with his incredible long jump record of 29 feet, 2 ½ inches.

*[PP Slide]

James was nothing if not practical, and he might encourage us to keep the following in mind:

- make sure brain is engaged before putting mouth into gear
- say nothing behind a person's back you would not say to their face
- imagine Jesus is beside you while you are speaking how would he react to what you are saying?
- remember the tongue, the power of speech, words, are the gift of God use them as a gift, to give gifts the gifts of teaching, praise, encouragement

I started with a story which kind of highlighted the negative

- so I'll conclude with one which highlights the positive, an example to follow:

In the first grade, Miss Grant said my purple tepee wasn't realistic enough, that purple was no colour at all for a tent, that purple was the colour of people when they died, that my drawing wasn't good enough to hang with the others. I walked back to my seat head bowed. With a black crayon I brought nightfall to my purple tent in the middle of the afternoon. In the second grade Mrs Adams said, "Draw anything." She didn't care what. I left my paper blank and when she came around to my desk, my heart beat like a tom-tom. She touched my head with her small hand and in a soft voice said, "The snow fall. How clean and white and beautiful."