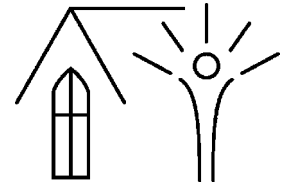




ROSELLE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

206 S. Rush Street
Roselle, IL 60172
(630) 529-1309
www.RoselleUMC.org



Our Mission Statement:

*“To Know Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Others Christ”*

September 17, 2006

Sermon: “Your Primary Languages”

James 3:1–12

Reverend Thomas Kim

Two days in a row, last Thursday and Friday, I found two Chicago Tribune news articles that caught my attention. Thursday’s article was about a woman’s suicide. It says, “*Mom’s suicide fuels mystery.*” Melinda Duckett missing her 2 year old son was interviewed by TV’s famously prosecutorial Nancy Grace who, during the interview, was pounding her desk and loudly demanding to know: “Where were you? Why aren’t you telling us where you were that day?” A day after the taping, Duckett shot herself to death. (September 14, 2006, *The Chicago Tribune*)

Friday’s Tribune article was about the pope, Benedict XVI. The paper reports, “*Pope’s ‘brusque’ words vex Muslim leaders.*” The pope in his speech at Regensburg University quoted a 14th century Byzantine emperor as saying, “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” Many experts on Islam warned that Benedict ran the risk of offense in using such strong language even though he added “genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today.” (September 15, 2006, *The Chicago Tribune*) The Vatican said on Saturday that Pope Benedict XVI “sincerely regrets” that Muslims have been offended by some of his words in a recent speech in Germany, stopping short of issuing an apology the Islamic world has demanded.

The two incidents remind us of the power of words, and the need of taming the tongue whether we are a professional interviewer or the pope or ordinary people.

It is fitting that today’s passage of Scripture is the advice of the Apostle James about taming the tongue. “*Look at ships,*” says James, “*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*” (James 3:4-5). It is the third Sunday with the theme of language. Are you good at controlling and taming your tongue? And now do you understand the spiritual power of words?

The tongue is a small but powerful instrument, able to have an effect that is every bit as influential as a rudder on a ship. Think of the power of words you have heard, or that you have spoken, over the course of your life such as;

“You are too small to be a good basketball player.”

“Girls should steer clear of science and engineering.”

“You can’t be a Christian and believe that!”

“You are such a loser.”

“Don’t tell your parents, no one will believe you.”

The Apostle James knows the devastating power of words, which is why he says, “How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire” (3:5-6). He knows that the tongue can be used to discourage, derail, dismay, deceive and destroy the precious children of God, and he describes it as “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8).

Is there any way for us to tame the tongue? The challenge for us is **to talk like a Christian**. This means that we do not use our tongues to “bless the Lord and Father” one minute, and then “curse those who are made in the likeness of God” the next (3:9). It is not appropriate to offer up enthusiastic praise to God on Sunday, and call your coworker a stinking bilge rat on Monday.

So what does it mean for us to talk Like a Christian — not just on one Sunday in September, but throughout the year? To talk like a Christian, we need to speak to other people with a full awareness that they are created in God’s image. There is a holiness built into each human being, a sacredness that comes straight from their Creator, and we miss an important aspect of their existence when we overlook this quality.

It is difficult, of course, to see the image of God in a person who has committed horrendous crimes — rape and murder, for example. But Sister Helen Prejean, the author of *Dead Man Walking*, believes that every person bears the image of God, even if he has strayed far from God’s way. In 1982, Sister Helen began corresponding with a death-row inmate, and ministered to him right up to his execution. After he took responsibility for his crimes of murder and rape, Sister Helen said to him: “You have dignity now, nobody can ever take that from you. You are a son of God.” If we can believe that about a death-row inmate, we can believe it about our most annoying neighbors.

In addition, to talk like a Christian means that **our words are a reflection of the word of God**. Go way back to the book of Genesis, and you see that God’s word is creative — not destructive. It’s clear that all of God’s words are designed to be creative, to bring order out of chaos, and to make something good.

The Apostle James is aware that our tongues can be both creative and destructive. “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing,” he says, “My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so” (3:10). Better for us to keep our mouths shut than to pollute the creative word of God with a destructive word of gossip or unfair criticism. If not, it’s better to remain silent.

This is an enormous challenge for us, because Jesus takes speech seriously, and he issues numerous warnings about the consequences of our language. For Jesus, words are never cheap — and they always pack a punch.

Let me more specific about the use of language in our daily life. Have you heard of a husband’s reactions to his wife’s colds during seven years of marriage?

First year: “Sugar dumpling, I’m really worried about you. You’ve got a bad sniffle and there’s no telling about these things with all the strep going around. I’m putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general check-up and a good rest. I know the food’s lousy, but I’ll be bringing your meals in from Maggiano’s. I’ve got it all arranged with the floor superintendent.”

Second year: “Listen, darling, I don’t like the sound of that cough and I’ve called Doc Miller to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl, just for me.”

Third year: “Maybe you better lie down, honey. Nothing like a little rest when you feel lousy. I’ll bring you something. We’ve got any canned soup?”

Fourth year: “Now look, dear, be sensible. After you’ve fed the kids and got the dishes done and the floor finished, you better lie down.”

Fifth year: “Why don’t you take a couple of aspirin?”

Sixth year: “I wish you’d just gargle or something instead of sitting around barking like a seal all evening.”

Seventh year: “For Pete’s sake, stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia?”

(*Illustrated Unlimited*, Edited by James Hewett, p.332)

How about your relationship with your spouse and children in your language? Words are creative and destructive.

Now I would like to finish today’s message with practical advice. Gary Chapman is best known as an author and speaker, and for his best-selling book, *The Five Love Languages* (Moody, 1996). Chapman repeatedly saw couples, parents and children not connecting. “I would have a parent say they showed their love by buying their son a baseball glove or a bicycle, but what the child wanted was the parent taking the time to teach them to ride a bike or throw a baseball.” He suggested the five basic languages of love. They are:

Words of affirmation: to say “thank you!” or “good job!”

Physical touch: to give hugs, kisses or to pat their shoulders

Quality time: to spend a quality time together in play or listening to them.

Acts of service: to help them with their project or do dishes and vacuum the floor.

Gift: roses, going out for dinner without condition.

“Each of us has a primary love language,” he said. “We probably respond positively to all or most of the five languages, but there is one that really makes us feel loved. It fills up our love tank. The important thing to remember is we are not talking about **your comfort level**; we are talking about your love for the other person. Love is something you do for someone else.”

Chapman admitted it is often difficult to love an unlovely person, but with God's power it is possible. "It is hard for an individual to turn away from love expressed in his or her love language. Be a channel of God's love." I believe the five languages of love are not only good for your family but also for all of your neighbors. Be a channel of God's love with your language.

So you can make your own decision about whether to **talk like a Christian**. Charles Spurgeon once said, "The bucket of the mouth reveals what is in the well of the heart."

The Apostle James commands us this morning, "*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?*" Jesus says in Matthew 12:36, "*I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter.*" Fellow Christians, what kind of languages do you have and use?