

“What Do You Say About That?” 2
Sept. 16, 2018

Proverbs 1:20-33

Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. {21} At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: {22} "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? {23} Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you. {24} Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded, {25} and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, {26} I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, {27} when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. {28} Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me. {29} Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, {30} would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, {31} therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. {32} For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; {33} but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."

James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. {2} 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. {3} If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. {4} 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. {5} 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! {6} 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. {7} For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, {8} but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. {9} With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. {10} From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. {11} Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? {12} Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine yield fresh.

Mark 8:27-38

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?" {28} And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." {29} He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." {30} And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. {31} 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. {32} He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. {33} 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." {34} 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. {35} For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. {36} For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? {37} Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? {38} Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

For the past few days millions of words have been spoken on the airwaves and in social media about many topics. The central one on most people's minds is Hurricane Florence. For those with interests that include family in the grip of the storm the vast majority of these words have been by nature somewhat discomfoting and frightening. There don't seem to be enough words that are adequate to describe the power and fury of nature and in Florence's case – it's longevity. There were the stalwart words from those who will 'hunker down' and 'ride it out.' Pleading words from officials who encouraged people to evacuate and from those subsequently who need rescue. Helpful words from the thousands who are lined up to offer aid. And words of anguish that turn into praying words as first responders kneel in prayer after valiant efforts to rescue a mother and child.

Sometimes the words of scripture are somewhat discomfoting and even sometimes frightening. But the words are meant to build us up, to improve us, to encourage us and allow us to live better and stronger lives – even when faced with daunting challenges. Jesus presents such a challenge for us today.

For Jesus, in Marks gospel for today, it is time to move the disciples to a point of greater faith for what is to come. Just like in John with the tough talk about the bread, here Jesus needs to know who is with him. One days as Jesus is walking along he asks a seemingly innocuous question. "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples, unsure of how to answer, relate what has been said of Jesus and they say, John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Then Jesus

asks 'who do you say that I am?' Answering for all, Peter says, "You are the Messiah". Meaning the anointed one, the savior sent from God.

Jesus says, knowing the general public will take this all wrong, a truth which is quickly demonstrated with Peter, says, 'don't tell anybody.'

Now, Jesus knows that they need to hear the whole story, the whole plan. He needs them to know why he's come and why they are chosen. He needs them to know what he's in for and what they are in for. So he says to them, "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." Now if way back there on the sea of Galilee when he's calling them Jesus "follow me and fishers of men" would have included 'follow me to a cross' these disciples would probably still be fishing. Peter, proves that by, for all of them, and us, obviously having a different understanding of what he's just declared pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him. We don't know what he said, but it probably included, we didn't sign up for this. Jesus puts Peter in his place and says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

In this pivotal moment, Jesus stops, gathers the whole group, even the reprimanded Peter and says, ""If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." At least in part, what we say is reflected in what

we do. We can say we'll pick up the cross, we're Christian, we believe.... But our words have to reflect our living.

Where are we in our belief? Do we understand, fully, who Jesus is? What does it mean to deny yourself? Has anybody tried that lately? Has anyone hefted a cross and drug it around? We've got wisdom crying in the streets asking us if we're fools who have no fear of consequences for our actions if we don't heed warnings. We've got James beating us up over some loose tongue talk, you know fun stuff like gossip and slander and talking behind peoples backs. And then Jesus with the deny yourself thing pick up your cross thing. What are you supposed to do? We're only human?

Maybe, now as always we do the best we can. But we do the best we can as that is informed by our faith, our relationship to God, our knowing who Jesus is. And that takes effort. It takes work – that's what Jesus meant by picking up a cross. Being a person of faith takes work. It calls for wise change. It asks us to watch what we say and how we say it.

Just using the theme of the day, how we use our words, how might we be better and more faithful? How does picking up our cross and following Jesus inform what we say and how we say it. Maybe just taking a second or two to think before we speak. The illustration on the front of the bulletin seems to be a fairly good idea. Before you speak – think. T- H- I- N- K. Is it true? This is a tough one because one of our favorite things to do is pass on what we've heard with far too

little regard for it being verifiably true or not. Truth is a poor commodity these days.

But if what we say is true to the best of our knowledge, is it helpful? Is what we say meant to be instructional, or beneficial, or enlightening, or hopeful?

And, if it's helpful is it inspirational? Does what we say build up or tear down? Is it meant to inform, encourage or compliment? Or confuse, degrade and criticize?

And if it is true and helpful and inspirational, is it necessary? DO we have to say something in every situation? Does everything call for a response? Yeah, there were people who could and should leave when a storm approaches. That's true. DO we have to point that out to them? Is it necessary to give our opinion in every situation?

And perhaps most important of all, if it's all of the above, is it kind? Kindness is woefully lacking in the human conversation. How we say things is so important. Might we say them with kindness. Couldn't that weather reporter convey the same truth by saying, it's a tough storm and its lasting way to long, but hang in there, keep the faith, be strong – the sun will shine again.' One reporter literally said, if we can, not do, but can, get just a couple more inches of rain we'll break the record for rainfall in a tropical event. It was like, 'Come on Florence.... Don't let me down.' But it was sadly said with little thought for 10s of 1000s of people living where another couple of inches of rain could possibly tip

the balance and flood their property. Sometimes we need to think. Should we say something? And if we do, how do we say it?

We are called to know the one who we are called to follow and to live as he calls us to live. It has already started, but over the next few days and weeks, once again, we'll witness the best people can give. In an interview, the Lt. Gov. of NC said some pretty good words, he said, "when nature is at its worst, we get to see the best of human nature."

The best of human nature is what Jesus is looking for. People going to say and do what we say and do – but with God's help, just maybe we can say and do it like we know, really know, Jesus.