

HOLY POWER IN YOUR WORDS



Scripture :

Psalm 116:1-9

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. ²Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. ³The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. ⁴Then I called on the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I pray, save my life!”

⁵Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. ⁶The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. ⁷Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. ⁹I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

James 3:1-12

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For 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. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or 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. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And 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. ⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine yield fresh.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



AN UNTAMED TONGUE

What does a wild evil beast, a rudder on a ship, a small fire, a deadly poison, and brackish water all have in common? These are metaphors for an untamed “tongue.” James says your tongue is responsible for both blessing and cursing. Remember the old saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”? It is so false! For example being called “Dark Meat” for a nickname deeply hurt the feelings of the only darker skinned classmate I had in my high school. His real name was Daniel.

Being called "country hicks" by city kids made us all feel “less than” in my growing up years in Iowa.

WORDS ARE POWERFUL

Words are powerful. They can make or break a child or a relationship, or divide a church or nation. That is why we must think before we speak, or tweet, or post, or instagram. The suicide rate among young people is increasing due to bullying via the internet.

Aretha Franklin passed a few weeks ago. She was a legendary unique and talented singer, songwriter, and beautiful role model of resilience. One of her biggest hits was titled Think! It was a song about the consequences of what we do and say. That is the theme on the front of the bulletin, in her memory. She started her career in a church choir.

PHILIPPIANS 4

So that you won't suffer from speaking without thinking, memorize the scripture in Philippians 4. Paul taught the Philippians how to be peaceful and have no anxiety by being thankful for everything and then thinking about whatever is pure, noble, right, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. If you think like this then the words out of your mouth will have holy healing power rather than destructive power.

Using words as a holy power involves first understanding the power of words, and then using your words to provide healing as Jesus

did. Using words as a holy power means stopping the tongue from doing harm and dividing people from one another. When ever we criticize others behind their back, try to bring others down by complaining about them, when ever we are silent when others are being abused, James would say that we are committing huge sins and promoting what he called a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

VERBAL ABUSE

I believe verbal abuse is more powerful than physical abuse. Psychological healing from repeated verbal abuse often takes much longer to heal than physical healing. James uses a wildfire image in this passage. He said, “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.” We know the destructive nature of fire too well.

**Jesus said it differently:
It is not what goes into your mouths
that defile us but the words
that come out of them.
And Psalm 34 says:
“Then you must keep your tongue
from evil and keep your lips
from speaking lies.”**

We know that a small false rumor can spread like a spark in a dry forest and become a huge wildfire of falsehood.

Yet, truth always takes courage and intelligence. To speak to someone face to face about something you disagree with takes a risk of being proven wrong or embarrassed. It is a hard risk to take, especially if you have low self-esteem to begin with, but it is the right thing to do.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Jesus had high self-esteem and he promoted face to face truthful but kind encounters.

Speaking truth to power was one of the main teachings promoted by Jesus.

“Speaking truth to power means believing deeply in what you say and fighting every day to have that heard. It may not be popular; it means taking a risk, it means standing for something.”

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jade-greear/speaking-truth-to-power_2_b_8824094.html

When we think of the phrase “speaking truth to power,” we might think of the Black Lives Matter Movement or the Women’s Movement. But the origin of that phrase, “speaking truth to power” was a phrase coined by the Quakers in 1950.

**On this topic, Tavis Smiley on his PBS show a few years ago said,
“Speaking truth to power means comforting the afflicted, and afflicting the comfortable. None of us has a monopoly on the truth. There is the truth, and there is the way to the truth. We must be humble enough to accept that we only know the truth that we know, at any given point on our life’s journey. But the truth that we do know, we must speak it. We must have the courage to say what we see.”**

That is the description for good preaching.

DO NOT SPEAK FALSEHOODS

I would add, do not speak falsehoods when you know them to be false. That is a sinful. Falsehoods are the kind of words that James claims "come from hell." Such falsehoods as:

- The Sandy Hook elementary school mass shooting was a hoax.
- The moon landing was a hoax.
- Climate Change is a hoax.
- Or that you know the day this world will end.

All of these cause pain and destruction over time if you believe and promote these false words.

HAROLD CAMPING

I have a friend whose neighbor in New Jersey sincerely believed the Family Radio star, Harold Camping, when he predicted the apocalypse would definitely happen on May 21st and be completed by October 21st of 2011. He convinced his wife that they should sell all the family’s assets, house, and car, and he quit his job, cashed in his retirement plan and gave the proceeds to Harold Camping’s foundation. Even though Camping was an engineer and a self-educated Bible interpreter, he had many followers on Family Radio who believed his every word about the Bible.

Sadly, the follower from New Jersey had a wife and two little girls. When the apocalypse didn’t happen, he killed himself leaving his family destitute.

Camping's fake interpretations of the Bible were the kind of false words leading to destruction that James was talking about, words from hell that cause major harm.

Okay now that was the cursing part of what the tongue is capable of doing, now let’s look at the blessing role the tongue can play.

HEALING WORDS

What are your favorite healing words from the Bible? Do you memorize and share them? Think about it.

For me here are a few: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not be afraid. I am with you always to the end of the age. “Have no anxiety about anything. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Forgive them for they know not what they do. Be still and know that I am God. Love your neighbor.”

Any others?

JOHN WYCLIFFE

When you read the words of the Bible in your own language, you are tapping into the healing power of God.

John Wycliffe is often credited with the first translation of the Bible into English from Latin. Wycliffe was an advocate for translation

of the Bible into the vernacular (language of the native peoples). He completed the translation in the year 1382, now known as Wycliffe's Bible.

I have friends that worked for the Bible translating organization called Wycliffe. For more than seventy years, Wycliffe has helped people around the world translate the Bible into their own languages. Today, more than one-thousand-six-hundred languages are still waiting for a Bible translation to begin.

Talk about the holy healing power of words, watch the impact of Wycliffe's work! (Here it is on YouTube):
<https://youtu.be/kCZ32q4Srys>

SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Let us ponder our ways of using words and how we can personally speak the truth in love, empower people to read the holy healing words of the Bible, and be quick to listen and slow to speak. That is the formula for getting along well with others in this life and in the life to come.

May it be so in our own lives, in this church and community. Amen

WHATEVER IS TRUE
WHATEVER IS HONEST
WHATEVER IS PURE
WHATEVER IS LOVELY
THINK ON THESE THINGS
Philippians 4:8

Benediction

Abandon the illusion you're a self-contained individual.

Be a part of this wounded world, and find yourself with Christ.

Set aside your own desires, give yourself fully for others;

be the hands and heart of Jesus.

Renounce self-protection, accept your brokenness, and reach out for love.

Let go of your own plans.

Join in the healing of the world.

You will not be alone.

Follow your soul, not your ego.

Follow it right into people's suffering.

Follow it right into the heart of God.

Pour yourself out;

let the world pour in;

then you are one with the Beloved.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen.



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**