

*O God, who makest us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of thy Son our Lord; Vouchsafe us this day such blessing through our worship of thee, that the days to come may be spent in thy service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Good morning!

You have to admit, on a day where we've got a tent set up; where we're looking forward to food truck burgers and snow cones; where we're excited to talk about and show off so many of our great ministries to one another, on a really fun day like this one, it is at least a little funny that we've got a lesson from St. James's epistle that really brings the heat. I mean almost literally, right? After all, we heard about a blazing fire this morning, started by the smallest ember. And of course, we heard that the human tongue can such an ember, able to bring great disaster and calamity even if it seems so small an organ.

As I've thought about this day and this lesson, I wonder if James' warnings about our volatile tongues can help us better enter into this academic year's season of ministry. What sorts of terrible things can our tongues produce that would make the coming season more difficult for us? What could we say that hamper our growth together? IS there anything we could say that might earn us a strong rebuke like poor Peter did this morning?

Sadly, there are many ways by which we can suffer because of our unbridled tongues. Though our lesson presents unedifying speech in mostly abstract terms this morning, there are specific things we can all do to make this coming season of ministry so much better. Even better, we can replace bad habits with good ones. We can replace grumbling with gratitude. We can capture those moments where complaining would be easy, but instead take stock of all the ways God and His people have been good to us and offer it back to him in thanksgiving. We can replace gossip with encouragement. Idly talking about one another's business seems super fun, until it really really isn't. Instead, we can edify one another by delighting in one another's victories, great and small, and of course being authentic and truly prayerful with one another when things go wrong.

And even as James gave us some very vivid images for what can happen when the tongue is left to wreak havoc, our lesson from St. Mark gives us an amazing example of what speech is always encouraged. We, like Peter, can always confess that Jesus is the Messiah. And in fact, sometimes it might be helpful to think about almost everything we do or say in those terms. When we speak to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to our friends and neighbors, even to the really annoying person on the tech support line, when we speak, we can ask ourselves if what we say and how we say it lines up with our basic conviction that Jesus is the Messiah. The cool thing is that just like the growth development of so

many other aspects of our lives in Christ, that once our speech lines up more and more with what we believe and know about Christ and his love, we actually find that our lives a fuller and more joyful.

At least that's what I've found. Before I started following Christ, I was actually one of the mean kids, and I never could figure out why nobody wanted to be my friend for very long. It took repentance and practice for me to develop good, healthy, life-giving relationships and most of that work came from God's having built an awareness that my mouth was the major way that people might know that I believe that Jesus is the Christ. And even though I don't feel like I have to start my Taco Bell order with the confession of St. Peter, (which is honestly kind of a fun mental image now that I think about it) by now I know that the even the guy who messed up my crunch wrap should be afforded some dignity, some kindness in the words I deploy, even despite the enormity of that crime.

And honestly, seeing how it seems like people are on such short fuses these days, I pray that our tongues would not be the sparks that to lead to destruction. Rather, I hope that with God's help our ministry together would produce life and flourishing. I hope that this next season we would see even more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. After all, there is no law against such things if I remember Galatians chapter 5 correctly.

This Rally Sunday, when we are looking to kick off a season of incredible ministry and formation here at Saint John's, I pray that we would let our confession of Jesus as the Christ to guide us along, to go to a place in ministry we hadn't considered before. Prayerfully consider joining a new guild or other ministry to meet new people and grow in your parish service. I pray that we would also be renewed by God's Spirit to bring our ministry together to the next level of excellence, beauty, faithfulness, and joy. Therefore, as we are called to be faithful and careful in how we speak, may we always be ready to extol the great and Holy Name of Jesus wherever we go together.

To Him be all Glory; from age to age. Amen.