

The Power of Words

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Scripture:

Matthew 15:10-20

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*“Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person,
but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.”*

Let us pray.

In a couple of weeks, I will be celebrating an anniversary ~ the anniversary of being called to serve as your designated minister.

Since then, we have done many things together. In this short time, we have conquered many obstacles and built many bridges. We have addressed some very serious and difficult issues. Some battles we have won; others, we have lost. Some are yet to be determined.

Almost since day one, I been working diligently with the City and other stakeholders in trying to address our concerns and voice our needs as it relates to the changes on Gold Street.

It has not always been easy, to say the least. But one element has become apparent, particularly, lately, and that is the power of communication: the importance of our words.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders at the time because his disciples failed to wash their hands before eating, according to Jewish law.

According to Matthew 15:1-2:

*The Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem,
Saying, “Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders?
For they don’t wash their hands when they eat bread.”*

So, the scribes and the Pharisees, who were considered to be the “police of the moral law.” The keepers and enforcers in many cases of the law, in seeking to be righteous and holy, created a wall or barrier that separated them, and I may argue, the people from God.

So, Jesus challenges this “law enforcement” and he says, “It is not what enters our mouth that hinders us, but what comes out.”

This day and age, it seems like there is something constantly coming out of our mouths. We are always talking. Not only are we talking to each other, notice I say “to” and not “with”, in person and over the phone, but also through email and social media.

The term “what’s trending today” has become part of our daily life and our daily routine. What trends on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media forums often shapes our news and our access to information.

Spoken words, written words on “real time,” are all around us. But yet, many feel that people don’t listen to them.

And perhaps it is because our words come wrapped in some bad habits.

Julian Treasure speaks about our “speaking habits” and he identifies, what he calls, *seven deadly sins of speaking*. We all have been guilty of some, if not all of his “sins.”

- 1) **Gossip:** speaking ill of a person who is not present. I think we know that that person gossiping about others, will gossip about us as well.
- 2) **Judging:** If we understand that everyone is going through something we know nothing about, it may help us not to judge.
- 3) **Complaining:** complaining is in the fabric of who we are as a nation. We complain about the weather, the economy, the traffic, the children, the elderly, the City, the State, the President, the church, the minister...our spouse, our mother...there is no end to our complaining. It is hard to listen to someone who is always complaining.
- 4) **Excuses:** blame thrower. It is everyone else’s fault but our own. Eleanor Roosevelt said, “In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.”
- 5) **Exaggeration:** words are overused and really do not mean anything anymore, e.g., “awesome.” Exaggeration often leads to:
- 6) **Lying**
- 7) **Dogmatism:** the confusion of facts with opinions. Because we have to do things “our way.” And why not? After all, our way is the best way and we’ve always done it this way.

But, I think that our words could be such that others would want to hear them. Words are powerful. While they can defile, they also have the power to stop wars. Heal. Change minds and hearts. They have the power to transform.

So, if we want our words do good in the world, Treasure proposes that we stand on these for things,

Honesty be clear and straight—tell the truth.

Authenticity be yourself, be free to tell your own story. There is something unique and powerful about one's own story—standing on our own truths.

Integrity be your word, doing what you say.

Love wishing people well

Of course it's not only what you say, but is the way you say it. And Julian Treasure notes that for those who speak with weight, we have to speak not from our throats, but from our chest—that gives us depth. We associate depth with power.

I would add that yes, we should all strive to speak to each other from our chests, that is, from our hearts, because if we do, our honesty, authenticity, and integrity will be enveloped in love.

Others will begin listening. Walls will begin falling. The church will be a reconciliation agent in the world.

We will be “creating sound consciously and understanding will be the norm.”

I pray that our words this week are full of the power of HAIL= Honesty, Authenticity, Integrity and Love, so that we are a blessing to ourselves and the world. Amen.