

Today I chose our second lesson for our text.

The title for today's message is: **Words Mean Things**

James said: **The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.**

Grace and peace to you from the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In a "Dennis the Menace" comic strip, Dennis is whispering in the ear of Mr. Wilson next door. "Now listen good. I can tell this only once 'cause my Dad told me not to repeat it."

One Christian author said that after a lifetime as a pastor, every imaginable sin had been confessed to him except for one.

He said people had confessed theft, adultery, even murder, but no one had ever confessed the sin of gossip! It's a sin others commit. We never do!

Oh, the power of the tongue! It's only a little part of our body, but it has such potential to destroy.

The tongue, like the mouse on a computer or a joy stick on a helicopter, is a little thing, yet controls all the hardware.

Such as the tongue, with it we bless God, and with it we curse people whom God has made. Lets look again at the way the apostle James worded it:

"If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check...."

Look all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue.

Its a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, yes those who have been made in God's likeness.

Yes, out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My friends, this should not be." If only we could just check our tongue a bit!

If we could just control our tongue as one person does a huge ship with just a tiny rudder! But sadly, we don't.

And one slip of the tongue works like a little spark that ignites a great forest fire. Yes, we can say things that cause people to hurt for a long time.

Some people never recover. It's a deadly thing, this tongue of ours. That's why among His commandments God gave us the eighth one, which is meant to protect the treasure of our honor.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Luther, in the Small Catechism asks: What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies against our neighbor, betray him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

Very few of us will easily tolerate damaging lies spoken about us. When this happens we want to set the record straight as soon as possible.

We want the world to know that what's been said about us isn't true, that we're better than that. Why?

Because we know that each untruth is a seed sown that will produce more of its kind, a garden full of untruths such as slander can ruin our character.

God's Word says in Proverbs chapter 12, "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful."

When we deliberately lie and make that a pattern for our life, then Jesus says that we're following in the footsteps of Satan! Ouch!

The second form of gossip is much more popular and prevalent: Rumors. Proverbs chapter 26 says, "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

As charcoal is to embers and as wood is to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts."

Human beings are always ready to pass on any "tender morsel" that they've heard about another, especially if that person is prominent in any way.

Many times we don't even check to see if there's any truth in it. James wrote: "Consider that a great forest is set on fire by a smallest spark.

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body." Imagine trying to put out a wind-blown forest fire with a squirt gun.

The third form of gossip is conjecture or speculation. It's when we interpret another's action based on our intuition.

Someone once put together a study that found that 80% of our guesses about the motives of others are wrong. 80%

My own experience suggests that the study was accurate, or on the low side of the percentage.

It reminds me of what a French writer once wrote in 1669, "Here in Paris they hang a man first, and then try him afterward."

Something like that happens when we gossip about someone. We hang him and then later he'll get a fair trial!

Why is it that we have such a hard time in keeping the eighth commandment? Why can't we bridle our tongue?

Why is it that we get such pleasure when we speak negatively about someone else?

Jesus gave us the answer: We have a problem with our heart! He says in Matthew chapter 15, "What comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart.

It's from the heart that we vomit up, evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lies, and slander."

Yes, the problem is our heart. It's our fallen nature. The fact is, we've chosen to do evil ever since our birth.

Psalm chapter 51 verse 5 says: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." What we need is a new heart!

That's why in that same psalm we plead, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

Angioplasty or a by-pass operation or other repair work won't do! We need a new heart, one that's attuned to God, one that's pliable to God, one that's responsive to His will.

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me," says Psalm 51 verse 12.

That's what we need, a new heart that has a willingness to it, a willingness, an openness toward God.

The Good News for you and for me is that God has given us a new heart in our Baptism.

Don't think for a moment that when the water and the Word touched you, the event was just some kind of symbolic act or a way for you to offer yourself to God.

No! Holy Baptism is the most powerful moment that can ever happen to a person on this earth.

It's when God, connecting His Word and His promise with that water says, "I'm going to give myself to you.

I'm going to give you forgiveness of all your sins, the hope of heaven, a new life and a brand new heart to serve me."

Because we're baptized into God's most holy name, because God has by His Spirit's power created a new heart within us, we can look at ourselves first and see our own true dignity.

I'm worth something in spite of my sinful nature and my many individual sins.
I'm worth something in spite of my unwillingness to take perfect care of this body.

I'm worth something in spite of my opinion that my body is not as good as someone else's.

I can look at others and see their God-given worth and honor, because as a human being we're the crown of God's creation.

As human beings, we're like a Stradivariuses in an orchestra of kazoos, there's no comparison between us and the rest of creation! And that's not all!

God loves us so much "that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life!"

And those of us who've been baptized into Jesus Christ our Lord know that to be true!

Look the eighth commandment of God implores us to uphold the honor of our neighbor, to uphold his or her good name and to protect their reputation. The honor of our faith demands it!

And so to help equip us with some practical steps that we can learn and apply to help us keep the commandment and to refrain from gossip.

There's a simple formula I want to ask you to follow. It's the word "think". The truth is my friends, gossip and slander can never be constructive, never helpful.

When we participate in it, we push God further from our hearts and sow seeds of malice, seeds which we'll harvest as a bouquet for our own lives.

Today God wants us to put a careful watch on our tongues and renew our hearts in His forgiveness and grace.

Maybe there's someone whom you've spoken against, about whom you've spread rumors or conjectures.

God wants to forgive you of that offense. Maybe there's someone you know that's gossiped about you, said hurtful, spiteful things about you and has hurt your reputation and name.

God wants you to forgive them, to free them and in the process bring God's freedom to your own heart.

None of us will ever perfectly keep the eighth commandment. It's impossible to do that.

But we can, day after day, return to God who in Baptism has given us new hearts filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who leads us and guides us in the truth.

Returning to Him, He'll open our eyes to see what He sees in each of us: His beloved crown of creation, clothed with dignity and honor and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

And now grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.