

First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)
210 North Fifth Street
Ponca City, Oklahoma

The 15th Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2009

Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19;
James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38
the Rev. Larry B Metzger, pastor



Chonda Pierce is a Christian comedienne often billed as “The Queen of Clean,” and is a cousin of Minnie Pearl.

She is very funny often relating childhood church experiences.

I heard her talking about standing in line at the grocery and looking over People Magazine. Chonda said she lives in fear that she will see her name in print. The issue she was glancing over had something about Billy Graham.

Now she figures if they can dig up dirt on Billy Graham they shouldn't have much trouble finding something on her. As she says, she wasn't always a Christian entertainer.

I think there is something in here from James that is helpful, or could be helpful.

A tendency today is to find something someone did long years ago and claim they are therefore disqualified to be a teacher or leader.

James is clear that not everyone can be a teacher because there is great responsibility that goes with it. So they are held to a higher standard than others.

The same tongue that leads and teaches is also the tongue that is able to destroy and inflict unimaginable pain.

He uses the example of a forest burning. That is not a hard example for us to get hold. The recent fires in California are a witness to how a single match, either intentional or carelessly is able to destroy home and lives, wildlife and vegetation.

The Greek word for perfect human can mean one who is flawless, but it also conveys the meaning of one who is whole or complete; e.g., one who is mature.

But even being mature we are given to mistakes because we are not perfect.

Words can be so healing. You know how good it feels to hear someone say they understand or that they are sorry for something that happened to you. To hear someone ask about your health, or a concern, or about your pet or parent, or child feels good, like somebody cares.

But words can also hurt. Centuries ago in Salem, Massachusetts, the words, "She's a witch!" spoken by a superstitious minister named Samuel Sewell, unleashed a fire of madness which consumed a whole town. 19 men and women were killed because of the accusations.

Not that many years ago in Washington, D.C., the words, "He's a communist!" spoken by Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, unleashed another form of madness which consumed a whole nation. He ruined lives and careers and ultimately his own career was gone.

They were just words, but they were thoughtless words.



Words gave Peter the preeminent position among the apostles.

His words were, "You are the Messiah." And then more words got him into trouble by rebuking Jesus.

If you know who people say Jesus is, then you respond one way.

The people understood him to be a miracle worker, a healer, a ruler of a New Jerusalem that will dominate world politics.

But when the question is asked who do YOU say I am, then we have a different response. We who know the Lord understand he is not about the categories, the pigeon holes, the special interest of this world. He is of another world, another dimension of reality, a world that is spiritual and everlasting.

When we understand that we will understand what it means to deny the self and take up the cross.

Here is the problem with the tongue: it more often than not flatters the self.

There were two literary clubs at the University of Wisconsin a number of years ago. One was a group of brilliant young men who gathered to read their stories and essays to each other. They dubbed themselves, "The Stranglers," so fierce was their criticism of one another. No punches were pulled. They dissected each others' work unmercifully.

There was a women's literary group at the University as well. They called themselves, "The Wranglers." They offered helpful criticism to one another, but above all, they supported and encouraged one another in their writing careers. They hunted for kind things to say.

Years later came the results. Not one of the men in the men's group went on to become a writer of note, but from the women's group, over half a dozen became famous writers, including Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings who wrote *The Yearling*.

I have heard words decrying one political party against another. Some one smoked marijuana as a student; another said one thing or signed a petition, another was an alcoholic, another had an affair.

What we find out is if we dislike the person then we claim they are unfit; and they can not change.

If we like the person then we say people can change. We forget the way we judge others will be the way we are judged.

The strict adherence to the law that we apply will be the way we will be judged. But also the compassion, mercy and understanding we apply will also be applied to our judgment.



We say we believe in redemption and reconciliation, yet I see little evidence of it lately. It seems our nation has become mired in believing the worse of another and anything negative we hear.

I do not see most Christians as having a problem of being the gossips or speaking with authority about things we know very little. The main problem I see with many of our brothers and sisters is the willingness to believe the wagging tongues without investigating for ourselves.

Somehow, we seem to enjoy watching one another removed from a pedestal on which others have placed them. The last Presidential election was the worse I have seen in a long time. People were willing to believe anything that was published or emailed. It seems to be a sport with several network talking heads to dig for dirt into the past. Political figures, sports stars, actors, or anyone else that seems to be famous and out of favor.

In a memoir of the years before World War II, Pierre Van Paassen tells of an act of humiliation by Nazi storm troopers who had seized an elderly Jewish rabbi and dragged him to headquarters.

In the far end of the same room, two colleagues were beating another Jew to death, but the captors of the rabbi decided to have some fun with him.

They stripped him naked and commanded that he preach the sermon he had prepared for the coming Sabbath in the synagogue. The rabbi asked if he could wear his yarmulke, and the Nazis, grinning, agreed. It seemed to add to the joke. The trembling rabbi proceeded to deliver in a raspy voice his sermon on what it means to walk humbly before God, all the while being poked and prodded by the hooting Nazi, and all the while hearing the last cries of his neighbor at the end of the room.

Philip Yancey says, “When I read the gospel accounts of the imprisonment, torture, and execution of Jesus, I think of that naked rabbi standing humiliated in a police station. Even after watching scores of movies on the subject, and reading the Gospels over and over, I still cannot fathom the indignity, the shame endured by God’s Son on earth, stripped naked, flogged, spat on, struck in the face, garland with thorns.”

Peter could not imagine such treatment of Jesus and that is why he protests. He recognizes the Messiah and cannot imagine that he should suffer at the hands of the Roman enemies on a cruel and shameful cross.

Like Peter, we are told to deny ourselves. Give up the desires of this world, like a wagging tongue, which is always popular, or getting on the bandwagon believing the worse of another.

In this age of incivility, it seems to me Christians should be resisting hatefulness, bigotry and gossip of any kind. It is our duty to reintroduce civility back into our way of life. Perhaps today, that is the cross we are asked to carry.

There is an Old Irish Blessing:

*Three things are of God:
The merciful word; the singing word
and the good word.
May the power of these three holy
things be on all the men and women
of the earth forevermore.*

May it be so.

