Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Words…

Matthew 12:36-37

Sticks and stones my break my bones but words will never hurt me….All of you have heard that statement and most probably have said those words. It is a marvelous statement, but there is one small problem…It is NOT true. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can totally destroy me…….

This morning I want to say a few words about a WORD. Jesus set a premium on words. “By your words you will be justified..by your words you will be condemned.” Eugene Peterson translates the last part of this passage --- “Words can be your salvation. Words can also be your damnation.”

Speaking is who we are. By our speaking will be justified and condemned. The church, I believe, should give great care to words. We get careless with our words. We throw them around as if they were nothing. We need to be careful. We need to be careful how we use words TO and ABOUT people. Words hurt, split, cut, break, injure, inspire, love. WE need to be careful….

I love the story about little Jimmy. Jimmy finally turned 6 years old and could sign up for T-ball (the story is obviously dated because I think kids can sign up for T-ball when they turn 1 these days). Well Jimmy signed up and got on a team. He called the coach… “Coach, when are we going to practice?” The coach said.. “Tuesday at 5. “Ok coach, I will be there.” The next day Jimmy called the coach again and asked.. “what time is practice, coach? I can’t remember what you said.” “Jimmy, Tuesday at 5.” “Ok Coach, I’ll be there.” The following day Jimmy said, “mom, I need to make sure when practice is.” He called his coach. “coach….” “Jimmy – Tuesday at 5.” “Ok, I’ll be there Coach.”

Tuesday finally arrived with a slight drizzle and by the time school was out it was a downpour. His mother said, “oh, Jimmy you have been waiting for this day for so long and now it is raining.” “Jimmy! Jimmy!” Out the door he went, with his uniform on, glove over the handle bars of his bicycle and off to the field. The coach lived across the street from the ball field and his wife looked out the window and said, “Isn’t that Jimmy out there standing in water up to his knees where home plate used to be?” “Well, yes it is.” So the coach put on his raincoat and swam over to the ball field and said, “Jimmy what in the world are you doing here?”

Now this kid is not very smart. Under adult care we will teach Jimmy to say, “if it doesn’t rain.. if I don’t have anything better to do, I’ll drop by one afternoon for practice or tell him you’ll be there and just not show up… But Jimmy said, “I’ll be there coach.”

I believe Jimmy’s expression is the raw material that could change you, a church, a family… could change the world. I TOLD YOU I WOULD BE THERE…..

You know by now that I grew up in Conway, SC. Conway is about 14 miles from Myrtle Beach so I spent a great deal of my childhood and teenage years on the beach and around the beach. One night way back in high school a dear friend of mine and I went to the beach. “Mom, I will be home at 12.” 12:30am arrived. 1am. 1:30am. I walked in the back door at 1:45am and guess who is waiting on me? My mother. I said, “what are you doing up so late?” “You said 12 midnight… To tell you the rest of the story would be self-serving….
A word is a powerful thing. Many persons come to me to talk about getting married. I met with a young couple yesterday in my office. We discuss the service and what marriage is all about… almost every couple I meet with will say, “We want it to be simple, short. We don’t want to say more than we have to.” So he says, “I will” and she says, “I will” and a new institution is added to society. Four words… He will - she will.

One night Jesus was with some of his close friends having a supper and after supper he said, “Pass me that left over bread… pass me that cup of wine… and he took the break and broke it and blessed it and gave it… He took the cup and SAID a word… and a supper became a sacrament because HE SAID SO.

Just words… Nothing is ever just a word. Words create new worlds. I can step into a crowded elevator and say Good Morning! And totally disrupt the environment. Words create new worlds. besides that words commit. “I give you my word.” A very ancient expression which means literally, “I give my life to you.” They don’t really mean that… just talk… just words…..

When you say a word you are doing something profound. In many cases you are breaking someone’s silence… think of the silence in which so many people live… the silence of being lonely… the silence of no one to talk to… and when you speak you throw a stone against the clear glass of silence and interrupt their world with your voice and your presence and the blessing of your life.

When you say "hello" your break the silence of somebody’s world.. and it is a blessing you can give so easily to someone, today and tomorrow. A word. “By your words you will be justified… by your words you will be condemned.”

Why don’t we all bless more with our words.. why don’t we minister with our words? It is because our culture has said to us.. words are not important? Words don’t mean anything (sticks and stones may break my bones but words???) Is that the reason? I don’t think so.

I think the reason we don’t bless more with our words is that it is so extremely difficult to carry on a meaningful conversation with anybody. You know the first thing to go is the voice. When someone is deeply moved they will say what… “I can’t talk right now.” I would like to talk with you about… but I am all talked out…. Have you talked to your dad about that? No Have you talked with your friend about this? No Have you talked with your spouse? No Have you talked with your minister? No NO… I just can’t talk to anyone…..

A husband will bring flowers and candy to his wife and she will say, “thank you, but I would prefer for you to say, I LOVE YOU. Then he will say, “Oh, go smell your flowers and eat your candy.” Why doesn’t he say, “I love you.” Because saying something important is the most difficult thing in the world for some of us to do….

A friend may always say.. “Nice weather we are having.” Well, maybe it is but unless a tornado or hurricane is on the way I really don’t care to talk about the weather. I discovered years ago that we have weather every day… Let’s talk about something more significant. Something that really matters.

Some things are hard to say.. some things are easy to say. Some things are even easy to shout. “Quit driving so fast in the neighborhood.” I can shout that.
“Have you got the mail today?” I can shout that. I can ever shout… “Have you ironed my shirt yet?” and a shout comes back.. “Iron it yourself!”

But I have never been able to shout in a grocery store, Wal-Mart or wherever ….
“I love you!” I have never been able to shout that. I have never heard it shouted. I have never been able to shout… “The report came back… It is malignant!’ I can’t shout that. I don’t even want to think about that…..

Why don’t we bless more with our words? Why can’t we talk about things that really matter?

In the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific some villagers practice a unique form of logging. Robert Fulghum in his book _All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten_ tells this story…. If a tree is too large to be felled with an ax, the natives cut it down by yelling at it. Woodsmen with special powers creep up on a tree at dawn and suddenly cream at it at the top of their lungs. They continue for 30 days. The tree dies and falls over. The theory is that yelling kills the spirit of the tree. According to the villagers, it always works.

Ah, those poor naïve innocents. Such charming habits of the jungle. Screaming at trees, indeed. How primitive. Too bad they don’t have the advantages of modern technology and the scientific mind.

Me? I yell at the wife and kids… And yell at the cell phone and lawn mower. I yell at the TV and the newspaper and the computer. I’ve even been known to shake my fist and yell at the sky at times.

Man next door yells at his car a lot. And last week I heard him yell at a stepladder for most of an afternoon. We modern, urban, educated folks yell at traffic and umpires and bills and banks and machines… especially machines. Machines and relatives receive most of our yelling and screaming….

Don’t know what good it does. Machines and things just sit there. Even kicking doesn’t always help. As for people, well, the Solomon Islanders may have a point. Yelling at living things does tend to kill the spirit in them. Stick and stones may break our bones, but words can break our hearts…..

You know, I can shout some things.. I can whisper some things. But there are some things I can hardly say at all -- the thing that really count and then I hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ… and I realize I need to try… By your words you will be justified .. by your words you will be condemned.

After we finish celebrating around the table that was instituted by a WORD… do you believe it is possible to go to somebody today and say something to that person that will make a real difference? Do you believe you could? Will you do it?

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