**Morning Praise @ Home 3rd November 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading James 3:1 – 12

### Reflection from Sue *The impact of how we speak*

As has become clear from the past two sermons, the letter of James is focusing in a very practical way on how our lifestyle needs to be integrated with our Christian beliefs. It’s no good ‘talking the talk’ without ‘walking the walk’. But make no mistake, our words matter too. What people hear us *saying* is as important as what they see us *doing*. Christians are called to be people of integrity, where every aspect reflects the Lord we’re following.

Sadly, as John told us last week, there’s no quick fix to bringing every element of our lives under Jesus’ reign. In fact, it’s a life’s work.

My husband loves watching dog rescue programmes, where poor mutts which have been conditioned to ill effect are patiently re-trained and carefully re-homed. Usually it’s a sweet success story, but in a clip I saw last week, the problem dog (who’d got used to being aggressive to smaller dogs), whose re-training had been carefully monitored by a dog psychologist, calmly entered the enclosure of small dogs … and, to everyone’s dismay, snapped again. That’s what the tongue is like, says James – just when you think it’s carefully controlled, something unfortunate slips out, whether in what we say or the way we say it.

Words are powerful – they can bring about great good and generate significant damage. James uses three vivid images that demonstrate the impact of this one diminutive muscle: that it’s like a small rudder that can turn a big boat; a tiny bit which can direct a large horse; a seemingly insignificant spark which can start a wildfire. Did you know that it is our tongue, not our heart, which is the strongest muscle in our body?

Bridles, steering and fire are all helpful and necessary, but they must be handled carefully. So must our language. A word out of our mouth …. can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

Remember why the prisoners in *Paddington 2* are wearing pink uniforms? It’s down to that one red sock which the unthinking bear included in the white wash. One rash word can have the same effect. With a few defamatory remarks, Tommy Robinson starts riots; with a slip-up from the lab in Wuhan, the Covid virus infected the world. That’s how seriously James is taking the issue of us controlling how we speak.

I am particularly exposed! I used to be an English & Drama teacher; now I am a trained Lay Minister. Words are the tools of my trade – and various misunderstandings I have generated over the years have reminded me that I need to be especially careful about what I say! As Proverbs 18:21 puts it: ‘The tongue has the power of life and death’.

Why is the verbal aspect of our lives so likely to go astray? James suggests three things which make it vulnerable.

1. When we moved from Gloucestershire to Nottingham, our sons suddenly started calling me ‘Moom’ instead of Mum; they referred to the school ‘boos’ instead of bus. You see, we all shape our language to fit in with the culture around us. And our culture is no longer Christian.

‘OMG’ is just a common texting shorthand for surprise; many of us will voice our frustration with the words: ‘God knows what’s going on!’ It’s what our culture expects … but does not honour the enthroned Lord we serve.

1. James also indicates that our spiritual enemy knows he can trip us up most easily through how we talk, both to ourselves and others.

* Internally we excuse and even justify certain wrong behaviours: ‘I’ll only take one’, ‘No one will notice if I …’
* Outwardly, we may smile to someone’s face, yet disparage them later: ‘Who does he think he is?!’ ‘Fancy wearing that!’ ‘She’s such a bitch!’ Satan is an accuser, the ‘father of lies’ (John 8:44), and extremely skilful in manipulating us to do his dirty work for him.

1. James also conveys how active and restless our mouths are. ‘Listen more; speak less’ is wise advice I find really hard to adhere to! Today, we also spout through our keyboards, sending hasty messages that, if we paused more, we would realise could harm others. How many of our politicians have lost their careers because of damaging messages! Remember James’ warning about rash words in Chapter 1?

The thing is, as Jesus explained, what comes out of our mouths is often an accurate monitor of how our heart is. (Matt 12:34 ‘For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.’) Do you remember that scene in *My Fair Lady* when Eliza Dolittle gets so involved in the racing that she drops her elegant pose and yells at the horse: ‘Come on Dover! Move yer bloomin’ arse!’ We forget how easily our words display what’s really important to us.

I know that, growing up as the youngest, I learnt to be sharp and witty simply so as to be heard – and yes, ironic quips can be entertaining, but they have often undermined others in a way that horrifies me when I realise. In fact, from the Bible’s perspective, we should all come to the revelation that, faced with the holiness of God, each of us is a person ‘of unclean lips’, living ‘among a people of unclean lips.’ (Isa 6:5)

So it’s a useful indicator that we *are* gradually becoming Jesus-shaped when our speech displays his goodness more than expressing our self-focused desires or our assimilation of the anti-Christian world around us.

Remember, James is writing his letter from the perspective of one who grew up alongside his brother Jesus.

* Even before he believed himself, he would have heard the reports, that: ‘All …. were amazed at the gracious words that came from [Jesus’] lips.’ (Luke 4:22)
* Then the testimony of those travelling to Emmaus: ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road’ (Luke 24:32)
* And Peter’s heartfelt affirmation in John 6:68, that Jesus had ‘the words of eternal life.’

Christ used words to encourage others’ potential, to heal and restore them. While he challenged wrong attitudes and behaviour, especially in those who used language to make themselves look good, he readily uttered words of forgiveness and blessing over those who realised that pious talk wouldn’t save them. His spoken encounters with people were affirming rather than destructive, motivated by love and hope rather than any desire to put them down. Just as the Old Testament predicted, even at his trial no one could accuse him of lying: Isa 53:9 ‘nor was any deceit in his mouth.’ Wouldn’t you like people to be able to say the same of you?

The good news is that we don’t just have a model of positive speech in Jesus – we also have his Holy Spirit now working within us to make us *like* him. Of course we need to co-operate with Him, praying like the Psalmist: ‘Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.’ (Ps 141:3) but the more we exercise control over our unruly tongues, asking the Spirit to help us, the more people will recognise that Jesus is indeed changing us from within.

* Our non-Christian friends and family members should be struck by the fact that we don’t malign others, we don’t blaspheme, we moderate our anger rather than letting rip.
* They’ll come to know that they can rely on us to speak with integrity rather than saying one thing to them and giving another report elsewhere.
* Could we resolve, when we leave this building each week, not to slip back into casual swearing or coarse humour? – not because we are ‘polite Wirral inhabitants’ but because we want to reflect the enthroned Christ to whom we have pledged allegiance; we want our speech to reflect God’s love.

I think I’ve said enough! **Amen**

### Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Tony**

Father, we pray for the unity of your church. We pray that we, and all who worship you, will remain faithful and true to your word brought to life in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We lay before you the political issues, the moral dilemmas and the dreams of peace that concern our world: in Gaza; the West Bank; Lebanon; Ukraine; Sudan. We continue to pray for those who are refugees and seek safety in another country, despite the dangers of the journey.

We pray for those whose lives have been broken by famines, earthquakes, floods and disease, especially at this time for those affected by the floods in Spain. Help us to work for the relief of those who suffer now and for the prevention of further suffering and loss of life.

We pray for our nation and all those who hold posts of responsibility. We pray that they will govern wisely with justice and integrity.

We remember before you any who are suffering from any form of illness. We pray for any who are anxious, sorrowful, or in any kind of need at this time. We know that you love them and know their every need far better than we do. Bless them with your love and peace. We remember them now in the quietness of our hearts.

We thank you for all our families and friends. Without them we would feel lonely and unwanted. We pray today for all those who feel lonely, that they may experience the gift of a loving family of friends.

We pray that God will bless John and Sue Coyne as they embark on a short time away from church duties and ask that they will be protected and kept safe while they are away and that they will return renewed and refreshed.

At this time we remember all who mourn the loss of loved ones and pray that those coming to the service this afternoon will find solace and comfort. We especially remember the families of Sue Mortimer and Sue Smith and ask that you hold them close.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**