**James 3:1-12**

**Taming the Tongue**

**3**Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, [a] for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2**For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. **3**If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. **4**Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5**So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! **6**And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, [b] and is itself set on fire by hell.[c] **7**For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, **8**but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9**With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. **10**From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, [d] this ought not to be so. **11**Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? **12**Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, [e] yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can saltwater yield fresh.

**Mark 8:27-end**

**Peter**’**s Declaration about Jesus**

**27**Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” **28**And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” **29**He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” [h] **30**And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

**Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

**31**Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. **32**He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33**But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

**34**He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35**For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, [i] will save it. **36**For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? **37**Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? **38**Those who are ashamed of me and of my words[j] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen, please sit down.

Have you ever been asked a thought-provoking question, like ….

* If you were an animal, which one would you be, and why?
* If you were an ice cream flavour, which one would you be,
* or even, If you had only one choice, would you rather stop time or be able to fly?

There is one question that stands out from all others, and we heard it in our reading today, the question that Jesus asked: the question of “Who do people say that I am?”

Marks Gospel is a Gospel of two halves. The first half emphasises Jesus as the Son of Man who came to serve; the second emphasises that He came to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

From this point in our reading, where Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins to teach the disciples about His coming death and resurrection. Three times in chapters 8, 9, and 10, Jesus tells his disciples that He is going to be killed and raised from the dead (8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34), but the disciples didn’t understand.

Theologians believe that Mark wrote his gospel initially for suffering Christians in Rome. If they were going to endure persecution and be faithful to Jesus, it was crucial that they understood who Jesus truly is. The matter is just as relevant for us if we want a faith that remains strong, even through the trials and tribulations that face us.

“Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asks. This is a relatively easy question. The disciples simply report on the buzz they have heard among the crowds, about Jesus’ ministry. “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets”, they reply. Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing does indeed resemble to that of the great prophets of Israel.

Then Jesus asks his disciples a more pointed question: “And you, who do you say that I am?” Peter, so often the first to speak, responds, “You are the Messiah”. The title “Messiah” in Hebrew or “Christ” in Greek was associated in Jewish tradition, spoken about by the prophets, of an anointed king, a royal figure expected to come and free Israel from their oppressors and restore Israel’s independence and glory.

As soon as Jesus begins to speak of what is to come in his career as Messiah — rejection, suffering, and death — Peter is quick to try to set him straight. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. We can imagine him saying, “No, no, master, you’ve got it wrong, The Messiah is supposed to conquer the Romans, not get killed by them.

Peter’s response is understandable in light of Jewish messianic expectations. These are perhaps not so very different from what we want, here in Baldock today. We want someone who is strong and powerful, someone who will rescue us from our troubles and defeat our enemies.

But Jesus’ response to Peter is harsh: “Get behind me, Satan!” He says. This is one of those moments in Scripture that highlights the vast distance between us and God.

Though Jesus is God with us, we cannot change him to what we want. I am sure we would like a Saviour who is a winner, and one who makes us winners too, but Jesus insists on identifying with the lowliest of the losers. He will allow himself to be mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the Romans.

And that’s not all. Jesus actually expects his disciples to follow him on this path of suffering and death.

We read, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”.

Jesus speaks of losing our lives for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel. Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences might be. It means putting Jesus’ priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security. It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them with or for others — using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience God’s love through Jesus Christ.

How can we possibly do this? Our instinct for self-preservation fights it at every step. In this sense we are no different from the first disciples. Though Jesus tried to prepare them for what was to come in Jerusalem, we know that they deserted him. And Peter, he not only ran away, he denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

In our second reading from James, we are told about taming our tongues. Whilst it is possible to speak without a tongue, albeit not clearly, it is made much easier with one. For with our tongue, in conjunction with our words, we can accomplish significant good with it or tremendous bad. With his words Peter confessed Jesus as Lord, the Messiah, but also with his tongue he readily denied Jesus. As we leave here today let us think carefully for the week ahead, what we say and what we do, and I pray that we too are able to confess that Jesus is our Lord and our Saviour Amen.

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