

## 19 September 2021, 16th Sunday after Trinity

### Readings:

James 3:13-4:3,7-8a

Mark 9:30-37

### Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Jesus taught us that not what goes into the mouth can defile us, but what comes out. Last week Peter preached about the first part of chapter 3 of St. James' letter. He told us that teachers and preachers should be careful because they will be judged with greater strictness because of what they say. All of us make many mistakes. And a bit further down the text Peter spoke about the tongue.

The tongue is a fire; it can stain the whole body. Many animals can be and have been tamed, but the tongue no one can tame. It is a restless devil, full of poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. St. James says about this: 'My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.'

We should examine ourselves what comes out of our mouths as individuals, as families, as neighbourhoods, as churches, yes as churches also, how do we use our tongues? What intentions and attitudes are behind what we are saying? How much is our tongue on fire?

Let us now for a moment have a look at today's Gospel. Jesus and his disciples come down from the far north of the country back into Galilee and Jesus explains to his disciples that 'The Son of man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again'. In fact the disciples didn't understand what he was saying, but they didn't dare to ask Jesus for more explanation. They were afraid to lose face admitting that they didn't have a clue what Jesus was on about. It didn't fit in with their ideas of the Messiah. Meanwhile walking through the landscape the disciples were arguing among one another. And when they got to Capernaum and were indoors, Jesus asked what they were arguing about. They stayed silent. Apparently they were ashamed of themselves. They realized that arguing about who was the greatest among them, was, to say the least, not a very kingdom-like discussion. And I

guess that many words used during their discussion along the road, were not very kingdom-like either.

And therefore Jesus is going to teach them an important lesson. And this lesson was again something they didn't expect from the Messiah; the Messiah they thought off as a majestic king. Jesus said: 'Whoever wants to be the first, must be last of all and servant of all'. And then Jesus puts a little child among them and putting his arms around the child, he says: 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me, but the one who sent me.'

This must have sounded very strange to the apostles' ears; they expected to be the king's ministers and now Jesus says to them that they should become childlike servants.

The idea of the messiah being a servant was not entirely strange to the Jewish tradition. Isaiah already spoke about this servant. But it was definitely not what the twelve expected at that time.

This was the reason that Jesus had to explain to them several times that he was going to be arrested and going to be killed; but that the story would not end there: he was going to rise again!

We learn from this passage that the apostles made serious mistakes in their days; they had a lot to learn from Jesus. One of these apostles was Jesus brother James, the one we heard a lot of lately. For several weeks now our epistle readings come from St. James' letter. In this letter St. James teaches us with great wisdom. He is speaking to 'the twelve tribes in the Dispersion' which means as much as to all believers all over the world. He teaches us how Christians should act, what they should do and not do. He explains that having faith or saying that you have faith is not enough. If having faith does not lead to Christian practice, if being a believer is not shown in your way of life, in your good works, then your faith is empty. Or as St. James says it: 'Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead'. Faith comes first, but it needs to be shown in practice.

Another point of wisdom from St. James Peter explained last week: your tongue is a fire; it needs to be restrained. It is used for cursing, but that is not what it is for. The tongue is for blessing: to bless God and your fellow human beings.

The wisdom in today's reading from St. James' letter begins with a positive incentive: 'Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom'.

So we have to be wise, understanding and gentle, according to verse 13.

But then immediately he tells us off in verse 14: But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.'

If the wrong intentions and attitude are behind what you are saying, you better say nothing. If your wisdom is earthly, unspiritual and devilish, you better shut up. Where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness.

St. James urges us to go for the heavenly wisdom, the wisdom from above, that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

And he offers us this perspective: A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

St. James came a long way: from a disciple arguing with his fellow disciples about who was the greatest among them, to an apostle sharing his wisdom in his letter for the Church to read and follow.

An incentive to stay away from earthly matters, including envy, selfish ambition, partiality and hypocrisy and to go for the wisdom from above: being pure and peaceable, gentle and generous, full of mercy and good fruits, a world of peace and righteousness.

St. James makes us look in a mirror; a mirror in which we can see whether we go for the earthly wisdom or the heavenly wisdom. As Christians we have no choice but to go for the heavenly wisdom.

Let us pray:

Through the apostle James we know that we have to go for the wisdom from above, the wisdom coming from you. But in our lives the earthly wisdom seeps through time and time again. Too often we treat the people around us in the wrong way; we can recognise that as we listen to the text of St. James, but too often we make the wrong choice. Give us the courage to choose for pureness, peace and gentleness, for being generous and full of mercy, working on a world of peace and righteousness.

Amen.