

From the Pastor's Desk...

As I am writing this, an incredibly tragic event has unfolded over the weekend in Charlottesville VA. You've seen it in the news. You've seen and heard the sinful, unacceptable words of hate, intolerance and racism being spewed. You've heard desperate words of frustration and fear, but you have also heard words molded into the prayers of many for healing and peace.

But consider the global context into which this awful event fell. In the week leading up to this tragedy the world was treated to a war of words that could have had devastating global consequences. Here too we heard words of anger. Words making threats of violence. Words that carried ultimatums back and forth. We even heard words of moderation brushed aside by louder voices speaking the rhetoric of war. But here again, we heard words formed into prayers for peace and healing among the nations. Fortunately as I write this, tensions surrounding the standoff with N Korea do seem to have dialed back a notch or two. But all it will take is some ill-chosen words to re-ignite the flames.

Clearly, lesson one from Charlottesville is that racism is evil. Period. It is a sin in the sight of God. It has no place in this or any society. We have seen once more that racism and bigotry only hurt and destroy. It is a task of the church to stand against such evil wherever and whenever we can.

But there is another lesson that we can learn from all of these events; **Words have meaning.** Whether spoken in debate, on the global stage or in our own conversations, words mean something. The scriptures make this clear. As I looked at the lectionary passages for the 20th of August, I was stunned to read this:

And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person... Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."
Matthew 15:10-11, 17-20 (ESV)

As I considered this passage I was taken aback by its incredible timeliness. The problem is that it would be easy to point these words of Jesus at someone else to teach THEM a lesson, to tell THEM how they ought to speak. But what if we read this passage while looking in a mirror? How would the product of *our own* mouths stack up in the light of these words of Jesus? That's harder, isn't it?

Here's the thing; You and I can't change the awful events of this past weekend. We can't personally bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. We can and should pray about these things, but our personal involvement beyond that is unlikely. What we CAN do is consider *our own* words in light of the words of Jesus in Matthew 15. We can consider the impact of *our* daily conversations at home, at school, at work. We *can't* control the words of others, but we *can* offer words of grace to those around us whether we agree with them or not. We can remember the words of John Wesley, "Do no harm." You see, as those who call ourselves Christ-followers

we have a responsibility not only to oppose hatred but to practice peace. Whether it is in person or on a social media platform, we can take the opportunity to pour the cool water of kind words onto the flames of anger. It isn't easy. We will all mess up at times. The passions of debate can get overwhelming. But if we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us, we can indeed be messengers of God's peace in an angry world. Read (or sing) to yourself the words of hymnists Sy Miller and Jill Jackson:

"Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me; let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God our creator, children all are we. Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony. Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now. With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow; to take each moment, and live each moment in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

Shalom!