

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Notes w/c 9th July 2018

Taming the Tongue- James 3 v1-12

This Sunday Thea spoke to us for the first time. She pointed out some of the brilliant images that James uses- the bit, the rudder and a spark- to illustrate that small things can have a large influence. These are metaphors for the tongue, for how our words impact our spiritual condition and community life. Verse 7 echoes the creation story (Gen 1); God gave us a mandate to control the world and a freedom in it, but that freedom is gifted to us, and when we cannot control our tongue it is a sign of our rejection of God's freedom. This is what happened at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). Because of the people's actions, God confuses their languages.

V 6 has echoes of Pentecost when *tongues* of fire symbol the redemption from Babel that Christ brings, and the disciples are understood in every language (Acts 2:1-4).

The tongue is problematic, but the problem is deeper rooted than just the tongue; we need to examine our own hearts, to see why harsh/difficult words are emerging. Just as a cloister has a central garden, often with a central waterfall, we have a 'room' in our hearts that has our secret thought - feelings, longings, dreams and fears, and that by right is shared with God alone and is a 'room' of prayer (Esther De Waal). When things get busy and we lose focus, we can go to that 'room' and spend time with God, reflect on that deeper spaces where our tongue speaks from. We are challenged to declutter our lives; just as Jesus turned over the tables of the money lenders who were cluttering the temple (Matt 21:12-13), we need to clear out our own 'house of prayer'. We can step into our own cloister garden, and go to the centre for refreshment and cleansing, and see the image of God reflected in the water.

Questions for your group to consider

1. Discuss the metaphors of bit, rudder and spark for the impact of our tongue. Do we believe our words can be that powerful? Can you think of examples (eg in public life/social media as well as personal)?
2. Earlier in this series we saw James urging his listeners to keep a tight rein on their tongues (James 1:26). Why do you think he keeps returning to this subject? Thea said 'the problem is deeper rooted than just the tongue'- what do you think this means?
3. The tongue is one of the smallest parts of the body but the hardest to control. Do you agree? If so, why is that? (If not, what is harder?!)
4. Can you think (maybe on own/in pairs) of one occasion in the last week when you spoke and now regret what you said. What could have stopped this happening?
5. What do you think of the image given by Esther De Waal of a room in our hearts and of Theo of a cloister? Do these images help?
6. What active steps can we take to help each other and/or on our own, to ensure our tongues are kept in tight rein?
7. Our tongues can also have a very positive impact! None more so than encouragement. Spend some time encouraging each other- be specific about what you like/find helpful in each other. Why don't we do this more?
8. Finally, use the poem below for a time of personal/quiet reflection.

Vacare Deum *July 2016 Be free for God*

Find inside my restless soul,
The cloister of my being.
A room inside for God alone,
The fount he is revealing.

A turning from the cluttered space,
His face I am pursuing.
And look again for silent grace,
Arise and let the light in.