

Sermon for Sunday, September 30, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"CLUE TO A POLLUTED HEART"

St. Matthew 12:22-37

Text: "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned." St. Matthew 12:36,37

My grandfather, who was a doctor, lived just across the street, so as a child, I had the best of medical care. If I looked pale or wane he would hook his thumbs in the pockets of his ample vest and with his mustache fairly bristling, he would glare at me over his glasses and demand, "Boy, stick out your tongue." In some mysterious way I could never quite fathom, he could judge the condition of my health and he always knew before I did when I was getting sick. My tongue gave me away.

Well, that's the way it is with the tongue. It gives away the state of our health. But most of all, the tongue gives away the state of our spiritual health--our hearts. The tongue gives us clues to the pollution level of our hearts. Did you know that? What is in your heart ultimately finds expression through your tongue. Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.." (St. Matthew 15:19)

We live in a time when talk is cheap. I don't necessarily mean talk is cheap in the sense that it is inexpensive. I mean it is cheap in the worse sense of the word. So much of what we hear today is simply raw sewage being spewed into our hearts and minds. But I want to tell you, the Bible takes speech much more seriously than we do. In the New Testament we find Jesus and the apostles deeply concerned to distinguish between right and wrong ways of speaking. You see, Jesus recognized one thing very clearly. He recognized that the words of a person were a clue to what was really in his heart. He recognized that words were a clue to the pollution level in a person's heart.

See how it works. Suppose I say the word "dog". What do you think of? Well, there is no such thing as a dog in general, for there are only dogs in particular. So, when I say "dog" you must think of some dog in particular--perhaps one you once loved and cherished, or the dog you have now, or the dog down the street that keeps you awake at night barking. Or again, if I say the word "car", what do you think of? Since there is no such thing as a car in general, you must relate the word to some particular car--the one you drive, or the one you would like to drive. So, words are never mere words--they are never empty words. They represent something in your life, something in your heart, in your own experience. Does that help you understand why Jesus said our words were so important? Our words are a clue--a key--to what is in our hearts. The words you say--the things you verbalize--are symbols of what is inside of you.

Incidentally, that is why counseling has been so successful in our day. Through what we say, the trained person can discover who and what we really are inside. Our words lay bare the raw materials of human personality. Our words are windows into the depths of human personality where the soul is naked, stripped of its pretensions and guises. To that extent, our words are a clue to the pollution level of our hearts.

So that is the first point I would like to make this morning. Our words give our hearts away. As Jesus put it in our scripture for this morning, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." The second point I would like to make is this: the Bible expressly forbids us to let our hearts speak against our brother. Over in the book of James we read, "Do not speak evil against one another

brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law...but who are you that you judge your neighbor?"

Are you guilty of that? Do you judge another person and speak against him? I'm afraid most of us probably do. The Greek word used in the New Testament for slander is the word Katalalia. It means simply "to speak against". Now, it didn't matter to the early Christian whether the story was true or not. To Katalalis--to speak against--a brother was wrong. Dr. Gerhard Kittel, a great Greek scholar, writes that the reason it was wrong was because to speak against one's brother--whether true or not--indicated hostility and malice. He went on to add, "it violates the early Christian commandment because of its uncharitableness rather than its falsity." Another scholar indicates that to speak against a brother indicated lovelessness which could not be tolerated in the Christian community.

You see, the fact is, to accuse our brother is to judge him. And the Lord expressly forbids us to sit in judgment on one another. (St Matthew 7:1-2) There are some exceptions--parents have the authority to make judgments about their children and the Elders of the Church have the duty to make judgments about the believers under their charge. (See I Corinthians 5:3; 5:12-6:6) But you and I do not have that authority in relationship to each other.

Sometimes Christians begin to judge other Christians. Because they don't believe exactly as they do or use the same words to describe their faith or express their faith in the same ways, they begin to judge these brothers. But let me tell you something very seriously. The Devil--Satan--is the accuser of the brethren. That's what the Bible says in Revelation 12:10. When we begin to judge and accuse one another, we cast ourselves in the role of Satan. So, the person who accuses a fellow Christian is acting according to the nature of Satan rather than the nature of the Lord, who instructs us to bear one another's burden and never rejoice in other's wrongdoing (Galatians 6:2 and I Corinthians 13:6)

It would sadden me deeply should there ever develop in our fellowship a group of super-pious Christians who in spiritual pride considered themselves better than others, who stood in judgment on others, who felt they were no longer capable of learning from others because of their spiritual maturity. In Ephesians, St. Paul tells us we must speak only that which builds up the body of Christ and not that which tears down (Ephesians 4:29).

So, the first thing we learn is that our words give our hearts away. The second thing we discover is that the Bible forbids our hearts to speak against our brother. Now, the third thing I would like to bring to our attention is this: the Bible forbids us to let our hearts speak against God. Do you ever let your heart speak against God? Jesus healed a man who was both blind and dumb. But the Pharisees said it was the work of the Devil and not the work of God. Jesus said that was the unforgivable sin. There was something wrong in the heart of those Pharisees. They didn't want to see God in what Jesus did. They didn't want to admit that God could work in people and in ways they didn't approve of.

Are you ever guilty of that? Today the church is divided between so-called liberals and conservatives. Each tends to claim that they have the truth and the other side is wrong. But doesn't that border on blaspheming the Holy Spirit? There are those who judge and criticize the charismatics--and there are the charismatics who tend to think that those who haven't had their experience don't really know the Lord. And are not both groups bordering on denying the work of the Holy Spirit in each other?

But the danger of denying the Holy Spirit is even more subtle! Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the rich fool? He said, "I will do this; I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" (St. Luke 12:18ff) Here is a man who credited himself with who and what he was. He gave himself pats on the back for who and what he had become. Is that the sin against the Holy Spirit? Is that taking credit yourself for something God has done in your life? Are you ever guilty of that? Do you ever forget or fail to see how God has been at work in your life? "Thou Fool!" God said to him, "This night your soul is required of you." He was a fool because he denied the working of God in his life and gave himself the credit.

How about you? How do you see yourself, your life, what you have accomplished? What you say about yourself is a clue to what is in your heart. Our hearts speak against God when we fail to see him at work in the world, at work in our lives. Are you guilty of that sin?

The fourth thing I would like to call to our attention is this: we need to let God give us a new heart. The Bible says, "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." I don't know about you, but that's my problem. I have an evil treasure. If you have an evil treasure, all you get is evil. One of the basic laws of nature is that opposites may not come from the same source. You cannot get salt water and fresh water from the same spring. As St. James puts it, "From the same mouth come blessings and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, by brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs?"

You know, the tongue is a marvelous thing! It can incite a mob to lynch a fellow human being, or it can inspire a nation to heroics. It can destroy friendship and break up homes, or it can comfort a soul in distress and despair. It can destroy a human personality by gossip and petty criticism, or it can encourage to new accomplishments. It can tear a church apart by personal glorification, or it can help build up the kingdom of God. Yes, it can do either--as Jesus put it, "for the tree is known by its fruit." What kind of fruit is in your heart? Your tongue is the clue. As for me, I am in need of a new heart. I need for God to be constantly taking my heart and renewing it. Is that true in your life?

In the fifth place, let me remind us that Jesus says on the day of judgment we will give an account of every careless word we have uttered. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? If we criticize, condemn, judge, run down, put down, or otherwise hurt others with our words, Jesus says we will have to answer for that. Our words will come back to haunt us. A poet put it this way: "I shouted aloud and louder... While out on the plain one day; The sound grew faint and fainter...Until it had died away...My words had gone forever...They left no trace or track...But the hills nearby caught up the cry...And sent an echo back." Yes, by our words will we be justified or condemned--like an echo caught up in the eternal hills of God shall come back to haunt us.

So, our tongues--our words--are a clue to a polluted heart. They tell us what is really in our hearts. I pray for myself--and I pray for you--that each of us will give his heart to Jesus to cleanse and purify.

O that my tongue might so possess  
the Accent of His tenderness  
That every word I breathe should bless!

For those who mourn, a word of cheer;  
A word of hope for those who fear;  
and love to all men, far or near.

Oh, that it might be said of me,  
Surely thy speech betrayeth thee  
As friend of Christ of Galilee!