



*“But no one can tame the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly 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. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.” (James 3:8-10)*

There’s an exercise I like to do with confirmation students when we’re studying the 8th commandment, which is *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*. Three students are chosen to see who can empty a toothpaste tube the fastest using only one hand. It turns into a big, gooey mess, and creates a lot of laughter. When the contest has been completed I then challenge them to be the fastest at putting the toothpaste back in the tube. Of course, that is impossible. Once it’s out, it’s out for good.

And that is the point. Like toothpaste expelled from its tube, once words come out of our mouths we can’t take them back. And if we happen to share those words on social media they are likely to circulate well beyond our intended recipient(s). We might later feel sorry for something we’ve said, but often times that doesn’t lessen their sting.

Words matter. They can lift up, or tear down. They can serve to affirm, or degrade. Words can make one’s spirit soar, motivate one to great achievement, and provide comfort in a time of sorrow. But words can also inflict pain, cause another to question their worth, and be the source of hurtful rumors. Words can be truth, or they can be lies. Words can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on inflection, tone, or volume. And so speaking carries much responsibility. The question is, how much do we think about that? We’ve heard the old adage, *think before you speak*. But do we?

Every time we speak we have a choice to make. I like this saying:

*Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates:*

- *Is it true?*
- *Is it necessary?*
- *Is it kind?*

We would do well to use these three filters before we speak. They align nicely with what Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism about the 8th commandment:

*“We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”*

Who will you be talking to today? This week? What will be the topic of conversation? However important - or casual - your conversations might be, perhaps you can let your words pass through three gates, or you can recall Luther’s explanation to the 8th commandment and allow this collective wisdom to filter your words so they may serve to uplift the person who will be hearing them.

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)