

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 13th September 2015 10am

Revd Val Reid

James 3: 1-12

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 8: 27-38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' ²⁸And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' ²⁹He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Sermon

Words, words, words.

I've heard so many of them.

Questions.

Statements.

Arguments.

Challenges.

Denials.

Pleas.

Wherever he went, there were words.

People begging him to help them.

People asking him to explain.

People criticising his behaviour.

People demanding a sign.

There were plenty of signs, if we had just paid attention.

If we had stopped talking for a moment, and listened.

Looked.

Seen.

I saw a paralysed man take up his bed and walk.

I saw a leper cleansed.

I saw a storm calmed.

I saw a man driven mad by his demons brought back to himself.

I saw a dead girl get up from her bed.

I saw five thousand people fed with five loaves of bread.

I could see that this was no ordinary Rabbi.

He did extraordinary things.

He talked to unusual people.

More important.

He listened to them.

That Syrian woman.

Doubly excluded.

A foreigner.

A female.

And yet her words made him stop and think.

Made him open his mind.

Made him take a new direction.

So in the last few days, I had been thinking too.

Turning these things over in my mind.

What did all this mean?
All these things we had seen.
All these words we had heard.

Out in gentile territory, in the region of the Decapolis, he healed a deaf man.
Deaf and without speech.
He took him away from the crowds.
Away from the shouting and the pleading and the questioning.
He took him away into peace and quiet.
He touched him – his ears, his tongue.
Eph-phatha he said.
Be opened.
And the man could hear.
And speak.

I felt like that man.
Until I met Jesus, I never heard.
Really heard.
Never spoke.
Or at least, never spoke words with meaning.
Just chatter.
Curses.
Jokes.
Enough to get by.
I never saw that words carried a whole universe.
That words could turn your life around.
That words could lead you to God.
Just yesterday, in Bethsaida, he healed a blind man.
Took him out of the village to a quiet place.
Again.
You can't do these things when there are too many words.
Words confuse things.
He put saliva on his eyes.
Can you see anything?
I can see people, but they look like trees walking.
Jesus touched his eyes again, and he could see.
Really see.
Clearly.

And yes, I felt like that blind man too.
I looked, but I didn't see.
And then I half saw.
I thought I saw.
Through a glass darkly.

And if I hadn't tried to use words.
Tried to say what I thought I saw.
If I hadn't taken the risk of getting it wrong...
Trees walking...
Then I would never have got it right.
Never have seen clearly.
Never heard the words I needed to move me on.

So when he asked us:
Who do people say that I am?
We said the obvious things.
John the Baptist.
Elijah.
A prophet.
That's what people said.
That's what we said.

Just words, though.

But who do you say that I am?
Now that's harder.
That means exposing ourselves.
Myself.
Taking a risk.
Saying words.
Words that might be wrong.
Words that might make me look a fool.

But if I don't say it...
people that look like trees walking...
...what hope have I of finding out?
I have to expose my ignorance.
The poverty of my words.
Before I can get closer to the truth.

And so I said it.
The Messiah.
The anointed one.
The one we pray for three times a day.
The one who will end wickedness, sin and heresy.
The one who will reward the righteous.
The one who will bring home the exiles, rebuild Jerusalem, restore the temple, reign like David.
Yes, that Messiah.

And so I found that my words told the truth.
And that they were a great lie.
He was the Messiah.
But not that sort of Messiah.
He was a different kind.
A messiah who would not be recognised.
A Messiah who would be rejected.
A Messiah who would suffer and die.

So *No* I said.
Messiah's the wrong word then.
That's not what we're expecting.
That's not why we're following.

But it was the right word.
And this was the true Messiah.
And I could hear him clearly.
And I could see the road to Jerusalem laid out before us like a map.

And I wish I had stayed deaf.
And I wish I had kept my words to myself.
And I wish I hadn't admitted by blurry sight.
Because now I have heard.
Now I can see.
And now I know that if I want to save my life, I must lose it.

But more than that.
I know that this God is not just about words.
The Word of God is not written on a page.
It is not chanted in the synagogue.
It is not proclaimed from the pulpit.
The Word of God is a human being.
And he calls us to follow him.

The Word of God must be lived, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day.