

Meditation

When I was young, new rector and presiding at a parish meeting, an angry parishioner shouted, “You are a lousy priest!” and strode out of the room. Immediately after that, another man came to me and said quietly, “That’s not to true. You are a fine priest, and we are blessed to have you.” I have never forgotten either exclamation, but it was the second one that had the greater power, and I was comforted.

The Australian actor, Tim Minchin, is reputed to have said, “Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can break your heart.” This wise, insightful, captivating statement is a takeoff on the old children’s chant “but words can never hurt me.” As we know, the old adage is simply not true. Over the years of my long ministry I have learned the one cannot really underestimate the power of words for good or for harm; surely every reader of this devotion can say the same. James tells us in no uncertain terms that the tongue is a fire – and he is not describing Pentecost here. Fire warms, cooks, and comforts; and, also, gives the greatest pain that can be felt. Words that we write or speak express the cultivated, godly depths of our minds, hearts, and souls. They also expose our hidden abysses of rage, spite, anguish, self-centeredness, and self-accusation.

Jesus is the Word of God, who reveals the divine nature. Satan is a title that means “the Accuser,” the one who speaks accusations. “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing ... this ought not to be so.” But it is so in our daily lives – in what we say to others, what we write on Facebook, what we say to those closest to us. Let us never underestimate the power of our words, their power to serve the Lord or the Accuser. James didn’t.

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