

Sermon – What Comes From Our Mouths?
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The Church of the Redeemer
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Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Do you ever wonder whether God gets tired of us? I know how that sounds, but there are times when I just can't help but wonder. Now, I'm not saying that he doesn't love us or all people, for the matter. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for him to not love us. It is who he is and he cannot not be himself. I guess what I am asking about is, given the state of our world and

our country and the rhetoric of our conversation, if we can call it a conversation, how can it be that he doesn't get tired of us.

I got tired this week. It was hate overload, no matter where you looked. The news, the talk shows, the posts, the emails; Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. Hate on steroids. From all sides. And when I say hate, I mean real hate. I don't mean the misused word that society has come to embrace. The one being applied to anything that a particular person or group disagrees with, or hurts their feelings, or offends them or some group.

For example, I feel that our health care system is best left out of the political arena. But if you feel that our health care system is best run centrally by the government, I don't think you hate me, and I don't think that you hate others. And I hope that you don't apply that label to me. We just have a disagreement on process. We prefer alternate choices from a list of choices where not one of them is perfect and all of them carry the potential for abuse and self-motivation. Society has now come to call those types of disagreements, to mislabel those types of disagreements, as "hate".

But the hate that I am talking about is not that. I'm talking about real hate. I'm talking about the hate that demeans and diminishes others. I am talking about hate that cannot be satiated without the total destruction of the other person or group instead of the repudiation of a misguided, and deceitful, sick way of seeing the world, while still loving the people, with the end goal being reconciliation with those trapped in that way of seeing the world.

That kind of hate, the kind of hate that is not motivated by love and does not seek reconciliation, was all over the streets in Charlottesville last week in the disguise of sincere and well-rationalized arguments emanating from people with a damaged way of seeing things. And please don't run out after the service and get CNN or FoxNews on the line, but at the risk of being the subject of ridicule and attack, I have to say that that type of hate was ALL OVER the streets in Charlottesville last week from many sides. And this week has become a hate-a-thon instead of a talk-a-thon, and a truth-a-thon, and a heal-a-thon. Hate, can never be accepted. It is not from God. But hate can never be defeated by simply hating more loudly. As Martin Luther King said so profoundly, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate... only love can do that."

It makes me think of the picture taken during the 70s at protests against the Viet Nam war where protestors put daisies in the gun barrels of the national guard who they viewed as their enemy. Wouldn't be nice if that was the approach today? Wouldn't it have been nice if Black Lives Matters had handed out flowers to White Supremacists? Scripture tells us that do so would be like pouring hot coals on their sick way of seeing creation, with the end goal being one of new life and reconciliation for us all.

But our damaged way of seeing others is so deeply entrenched in us. This week we had a meeting of the clergy of the ARCUM churches here at Redeemer. Towards the end, one of the

pastors shared a conversation they had with a pastor of a different race about race reconciliation. The two of them were talking about how we, how different races, need to come together to talk if we are going to make progress. And that is absolutely true. As their conversation continued one said to the other something like this: "But if we are going to meet, we have to start with the everything clear and on the table. Before we talk, we need to recognize that you don't like us, and we don't like you!"

As the pastor who was sharing the story was commending the bravery of the other pastor in stating some profound truth, I couldn't hold my tongue. I told the group, that I beg to differ. From my experience, that is simply not true in general. We don't dislike each other. The average person who I encounter of a different race treats me well, even when I don't have my collar on. And I treat them as a brother or sister. And I see that again and again and again by people from Redeemer and by the vast majority of those strangers I witness in public. People of different races interacting in a civil, and even loving, way to fellow children of God.

Our starting point is not dislike. I know that is what we are led to believe, but that is not my experience. There might be a lack of understanding, certainly there is a troubled history, but I think that people sincerely want to like other people. That is how we were made to be.

So what is going on? If a visitor from another galaxy came to earth this past week, they would have to conclude that we are a society steeped in, and fed by, hate for each other. Do these groups that are the lead story on all the news programs really accurately reflect who we are. Well, let's do some math.

There were about 500 marchers present in Charlottesville representing white supremacists, and neo-nazis, and the like. It was meant to be a national gathering, but let's say it was really just a state-wide event and let's further assume that each state could probably gather the same number of people, if they were to have a similar march. So that's 500 x 52 or 26,000 sick individuals who hold these beliefs. Now, let's assume even further that those who attended, those who got into their cars and drove miles to the protest, are only 1% of all those who hold those beliefs. That means that in each state there are 5,000 which means, nationally, there are 260,000. Now let's also assume that the same applies for the other side, the other extreme, who were also carrying sticks aching for a fight. That brings us to 520,000 people motivated by true hate. In a country of 326,000,000 people they represent 1.5 one hundredth of a percent (0.015%) of all Americans.

That means that 99.985% were not represented in the past week. Now, I know that this mathematical argument is simplistic, so use your own numbers. And I know that we have struggles to still combat. We have severe dysfunctions that we must deal with. But I wonder, when will we, when will the 99.985%, stand up and refuse to be defined by either side of the extreme. When will the majority of human beings, who simply want to live together in love, speak up and not let others; protestor, politicians, and media; paint our country in a way that we don't recognize in our daily lives and certainly don't hold in our personal hearts?

Jesus told us this morning that it is what comes out of our mouths that defiles each of us. Our words and actions tell others what the content of our hearts is. When evil intentions, and murder, and adultery, and fornication, and false witness, and slander pour from our hearts it tells of our condition. But I believe that the unsaid, but much more powerful, reality in Jesus' teaching is that the "good" that comes from our mouths also tells about the condition of our hearts. When we speak and live love, and hope, and uplift of others, and reconciliation and unity around God, those are the things that we become defined by and known by.

This should be our message, this should be the message of the church and the other 99.985%, to all people who are in the streets duking it out: We have a voice in this world, and our voice will not be defined by the extremes. We have a voice in this world, let's not use it as a weapon bent on destruction, but make it one of love for others and hope for healing, and reconciliation, and unity.

God has given each of us a mouth in this world. Let what comes out of it not defile us, but rather save us.

Amen