

"Seven Words We Don't Use in Church"

7 Week Sermon & Worship Series
Sundays, July 15 – August 26, 2018
First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Preaching: Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. James L. Brewer-Calvert

Date	Theme	Holy Scriptures
July 15	SMILE	I Thessalonians 5: 14-18
July 22	CURSES	Psalms 19; Matthew 15: 1-13
July 29	GOSSIP	Proverbs 12: 18; James 3: 9-12; 1 Corinthians 13
August 5	SCIENCE	Genesis 1
August 12	PRONOUNS	Matthew 7: 7-12
August 19	SHAME	John 4
August 26	SEX	Song of Solomon

Sunday, July 29, 2018 **"GOSSIP"**

Proverbs 12:18

Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

James 3:1-13

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For 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. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴ Or 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. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶ And 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. ⁷ For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

I Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all

things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

"Did you know..."

Can we talk about gossip?

Let's talk about what we talk about.

And who. Who we talk about.

And how...and when...and why we talk about one another,
when it's good and right to do so, and when it's not.

They say that one afternoon three ministers met privately to share their innermost confidences and pray for one another.

The first, a Catholic priest, confessed to his friends
that he had a serious problem with alcohol.

He shared that he often found himself inebriated,
and told how he was frequently stumbling, literally and figuratively.

He asked for prayer to help him recognize he was powerless over alcohol.

The other two promised they would.

The second, a Jewish rabbi, encouraged by his candor,
admitted that she, too, had a problem, only with money and not alcohol.

She said she couldn't resist skimming occasionally from the
temple

treasury,
and was guilty of financial indiscretions.

She confessed her need to practice honesty and reimburse the temple,
and asked for prayer.

The other two promised they would.

The third, a Protestant pastor, then reluctantly confided.

"I must confess how much I appreciate the remarkable candor of both of you.

My weakness is gossip, and I can hardly wait to get out of here!"

"Did you know..."

The Gift of Love

*"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love,*

I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ...

Love is patient; love is kind;

love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;

it is not irritable or resentful;

it does not rejoice in wrong doing but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things,

hopes all things, endures all things."

You have heard this before.

Paul's inspired passage in 1st Corinthians 13

is often shared at weddings, social occasions, and remembrances.

Paul speaks to us of love, and to the nature and nurture of love.

This love he speaks of is agape, an unconditional love,

a divine love that we have in us as well,

a love freely given, freely shared, powerful,

more than enough to transform and change a life and a universe,

a gift from the Changer and the Changed,

the gift of God itself.

If the language we express is not grounded in this love,

our words clang like a noisy gong.

If the intent, the motivation underlying our efforts to communicate, to relate, to care,

to share the stories and narratives of our lives

is grounded in love, in agape,

"...then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known."

When we speak the truth in love and tell our stories in love,

then we aren't boastful or arrogant or rude,

but are rejoicing in truth and one another.

"...then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known."

What about when we tell someone else's story,

someone else's pain or grief or experiences?

What might be helpful is to differentiate between malicious gossip and genuine care.

"Gossip is sharing personal information with someone

who is neither part of the problem nor part of the solution."

"Did you know..."

"As social creatures, we're hardwired to gossip." [Psychology Today]

"Like it or not, we are the descendants of busybodies.

[Evolutionary psychologists believe](#) that our preoccupation with the lives of others is a byproduct of a prehistoric [brain](#).

[According to scientists](#), because our prehistoric ancestors lived in relatively small groups, they knew one another intimately.

In order to ward off enemies and survive in their harsh natural environment, our ancestors needed to [cooperate](#) with in-group members.

But they also recognized that these same in-group members were their main competitors for mates and limited resources.

Living under such conditions, our [prehistoric] ancestors

[needed to know] who's reliable and trustworthy?

Who's a cheater? Who would make the best mate?

How can friendships, alliances, and family obligations be balanced?

In this sort of environment, an intense interest in the private dealings of other people would have certainly been handy--and strongly favored by natural selection.

The [genes](#) of those individuals were passed along from one generation to the next.

[Psychology Today "Gossip is a Social Skill - Not a Character Flaw" Posted Jan 24, 2016]

In other words, as social creatures, we're hardwired to gossip.
Seen in this light, we've been busybodies since we stood upright.
As social creations of God, we're hardwired to love.
The challenge, fellow busybodies,
is to ensure that love takes the point, to let love reign in our hearts and
minds.

"Did you know..."

Consider the difference between gossip and concern.

Gossip is a conversation about personal matters or details of other people's lives,
whether rumor or fact, especially when malicious. (Bing.com)

Concern is caring feelings, feelings of worry, compassion, sympathy,
or regard for somebody or something. (Bing.com)

This is tough for us.

...Many seemingly innocent conversations between friends...

either begin with or include, "Did you know...?".

Even well-meaning Christians slip up

when sharing "prayer requests" with one another.

We may truly believe we're sharing out of concern for somebody.

Or, we may be trying to impress someone with our inside knowledge.

We may be genuine and compassionate and well-meaning.

We may be careless or judgmental,

or we may at times be envious, petty, or even vindictive.

One recent Shrove Tuesday evening,

also known as Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday,

here at our church's annual all-you-can-eat pancake supper,

I was offering a meditation on Lent.

As I encouraged folks to give up something for Lent

as well as to take something on,

to take on prayer, service, study, and so forth,

Charlotte Ivey quipped, "*My friend says that each Lent*

she gives up passing on the gossip she listens to.

She doesn't say she will give up listening to it in the first place."

If you don't say it, they can't repeat it.

Here is something worth repeating, like a mantra:

*"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or
rude."*

"Did you know..."

"What's the difference between gossip and concern? [Doug Sprague]

I'd say it's **Motive**.

What is your motivation in sharing someone else's life?

The genuine, honest answer to the question,

"Why am I telling this to somebody?"

will reveal whether it's gossip or caring.

How do you fare in this?

Here is a checklist of affirmations:

*I protect the confidences of others!
I truly care about what's best for the people in my life!
My motives regarding others are pure and selfless!"*

[Adapted from Doug Sprague / dougsp Praguecheer.com]

The differences between careless sharing and careful caring are as vast as oceans.
We name these oceans Motivation, Permission, and Integrity.

Are you sharing a truth and not a rumor?
Are you speaking with integrity?
Are you sharing your own or someone else's experience?
Did she or he give you permission to do so?
What's your underlying purpose?
Are your motivations pure and selfless?

"Did you know..."

One afternoon around a dozen years ago
I was here, in the Pastor's Study, sitting in a comfy chair,
reading Eugene Peterson's book
Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity.
Eugene Peterson, who also wrote the Bible translation The Message,
encouraged pastors to focus on
praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction.
I was cruising through his book, nodding in approval
when I came upon a passage in which he rebukes spiritual guides
who listen to the person in front of them
to gain something for themselves,
rather than seeking to be fully present for them.
I started to get this uneasy feeling in my gut.
Then he wrote about preachers who listen to people looking for sermon examples.
Suddenly the prophet Nathan stepped into the Pastor's Study.
"Thou art the man!"
That's what the prophet Nathan said to King David
after he had Uriah the Hittite killed so David could take Uriah's wife
Bathsheba.
"Thou art the man!" said Eugene to James.
In one fell swoop I was arrested, tried and convicted of ineffectual pastoral care.
I vowed to stop cold turkey, to change as best I could.
Slowly but surely, I altered my listening habits and priorities.
I began to pay attention to people
without distractedly imagining
how I might use their story to my professional or personal benefit.
I locked in on their eyes and voice;
the tone and tenor of their speech;
the words spoken as well as ones left unsaid,
the hopes and pains underlying the content of their sharing.
Within weeks I started to receive fresh, previously unheard-of feedback.
"Thank you for listening. I feel like you really heard me, you get me, you understand."

What changed? What was the difference?
My personal and professional motivation.
All my life I've listened because I care;

the difference after my conviction by Nathan and Eugene
was the new conviction of my faith practice.
I began to put other people's needs above my own gain.
Honestly, afterward I became a better husband, a better father,
a better friend, a better follower of God.
I share this with you not to brag or boast.
I share this humbly and honestly,
as a living, breathing example of the power of God to transform,
to renew, to restore a life, an attitude, a set of priorities.
I once was selfish. I was reborn. I am grateful.

"Did you know..."

One of the problems of gossip, if you will, is its inherent intent is selfish.
We see this almost daily on Social Media.

Scary thought:

are you like me, wondering if some folks have relationships
in order to have fresh material to post...
[And why isn't posting of children's foibles and falls and farts considered gossip,
even--and especially--if it's the parents who do so?]

The Good News is we have the capacity to grow in Christ.
God loves you and calls for you to let God's love be in your speaking and sharing.

*"[Love] does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice in wrong doing but rejoices in the truth.
[Love] bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things."*

"Did you know..."

Yiddish folklore offers a telling tale about gossip.
A man had told so many malicious untruths about the local rabbi that,
overcome by remorse, he begged for forgiveness.
"Rabbi, how can I make amends?"
"Find two goose-down pillows," said the holy man.
"Go to the public square and cut the pillows open.
Wave them in the air. Then come back."
The rumormonger quickly went home, collected two pillows and scissors,
hastened to the town square,
cut open the pillows and waved them in the air.
He hastened back.
"I did just what you said, Rabbi!"
"Good." The rabbi smiled.
"Now, to realize how much harm is done by gossip,
go back to the square..."
"Cut open more pillows?" he asked.
"No, even better," said the rabbi. "Collect all the feathers."

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!