

Exodus 20:16 The 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Speak the truth in love!

Pentecost 13 August 30,31, 2009 Children's talk: The tongue is important to speak what is good!

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God's Word to show us the value of a good reputation is written in Exodus 20:16

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Keep us from saying things that later need recalling; grant that no idle words may from our lips be falling, but then, when in our place we must and ought to speak, grant our words power and grace lest we offend the weak. Amen. (CW #459 v.3)

Dear Friends, in Christ,

It has been said that the mouth is like a window to a person's spiritual heart. The words that come from our mouths reveal our character. We would like to be filled with spiritual warmth and compassion which overflow from Jesus' kindness. But, sometimes our words show coldness and the spite of the devil. We have power with our mouths to hurt or to heal, to do evil or good, to curse or to bless. God has given us the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment so that we might better know how to speak in ways that honor Him and that benefit people. Our theme is:

### **Speak the truth in love!**

**First, why is God so concerned about the truth?** Truth is part of God's nature. When He speaks He wants people to be certain that they can trust in what He says. Jesus said of His Father, "*Your Word is truth.*" (John 17:17) Jesus called Himself, "*the way, the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6) In the book of John, Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.*" (John 8:32)

God demands that all people to tell the truth. In the court system of the Jews, God wanted equal justice for all. Witnesses were to always tell the truth so that the guilty were punished and the innocent set free. False witnesses would pervert such justice. So, God warned in His Word, "*A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.*" (Proverbs 19:5) Rather Proverbs tells us what God expected, "*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*" (Proverbs 31:8-9)

God expects no less of Christians today. Paul wrote, "*Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor.*" (Ephesians 4:25) We are to speak the truth because as Christians we represent God. How will people listen to us speak about Christ as the Savior, if they can't trust what we say in everyday life? Why should people want to hear us talk about the love of God, if at the same time they hear us speak in a harmful ways of others? God said in James, "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*" (James 3:9-10) God requires that we speak respectfully of others and be concerned about their reputation and about His reputation.

**Second, what are ways we break this commandment?** There is lying. Who doesn't stretch the truth once a while or exaggerate to make ourselves look better or someone else look worse? At other times we should speak up and tell the truth about something, but we don't do it, so that people are left with a false impression. Even though we know that we are to protect a person's reputation, it is difficult to do. There was a story in a small town of a church leader who was seen coming out of a tavern late at night and he fell face down on the ground. The next day, word spread that the man must have been drunk. In reality, the man was returning from a business trip and had car trouble outside of town. He had walked to the tavern to use the phone and then coming out, he had tripped on an uneven sidewalk. Why is it that people are so ready to speak about something that will bring shame to others? Does it make us better if others appear worse? Is life so boring that any news, true or not is better to spread than no news? Ever since Adam and Eve listened to the lie of the devil, we have been prone to follow his ways. Martin Luther wrote, "The one who slanders has the devil on his tongue, while the one who listens has the devil in his ear." (Large Catechism)

God also forbids that we slander or betray people. To betray someone means to reveal something that has been told to us in secret. *"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."* (Proverbs 11:13) Many times when David was fleeing for his life from King Saul, people would report David's position and endanger his life. They didn't care if David was innocent. They just wanted the king's favor. To slander means that we purposely lower another person's reputation. When Jesus' enemies found no fault in Him, they turned to character assassination, saying that He was from the devil or a liar. Every question they asked Him was to get proof to condemn Him.

Think of how the devil can use people to bring harm through people's speaking. During holy week he moved Judas to betray Jesus. He had Peter lie about knowing Jesus. He moved the Jewish leaders to hire false witnesses at Jesus' trial. When Jesus spoke the truth that He was God's Son, they condemned Him to death. Pontius Pilate declared Jesus innocent and then sentenced Him to death. The devil must have been quite pleased!

**Third, as Christians we are to speak the truth in love.** There are times when we must judge others, if it is for a person's good or for the honor of God's Word. Jesus condemned the loveless actions Pharisees or false teachings of the Jewish leaders. When we see a person in spiritual danger or hear of something false, we must speak a warning. After the ELCA recently passed a resolution at their convention that active homosexuals should serve as pastors, our synod sent out a statement clearly saying that this was against the clear teachings of God's Word, and that we should pray for the people who have been so misguided from the truth. This is speaking the truth in love!

Think of Jesus' example. If people told Him rumors about King Herod, He didn't listen, nor did He spread it. When He met sinful people, He did not gossip about them. He spoke with them personally so that they would turn from their sins to His forgiveness. On Maundy Thursday, when Jesus was arrested, He spoke up to keep His disciples from being taken. During His many trials on Good Friday, Jesus always spoke the truth, even if it meant His death. He told Pilate, *"For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth."* (John 18:37) He even put the best construction on everything, praying that God forgive His enemies who crucified Him in ignorance.

Our motivation to speak the truth in love is Jesus' in forgiveness of us. Think how many times He has heard us say lies or harmful things about others. Yet, Jesus doesn't stand before God and complain about us! He doesn't seek to shame us eternally as we deserve. He pleads before His Father with His nail-scared hands and says to God that His death has completely take away our sins. Jesus has replaced those sins with His perfect words of love. So, we are to follow His example in how we speak. We should do as Jesus said, *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."* (Matthew 18:15)

If we are to talk about others, let us praise them for the good that they do and use our mouths to make life better and brighter for others. Encourage them and give honest appreciation. Remember, once a word is spoken, it's like an arrow shot from a bow. It can't be taken back. So, make your words true, good, and helpful. As followers of Christ, we should be known for our truthfulness. If our mouths are a window that show what's in our hearts, let our words show Jesus and His forgiveness. The more study God's Word, the more Jesus will speak through us in love. Then, as we speak the truth in all things, people will learn the saving truth that gives eternal life in Christ. Amen.