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 Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
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Taming the Tongue!

James 3:1-12

Welcome back to Jim class. Pastor Wayne and I hope many of you are taking time to read the 5 short chapters of the book of James for yourselves – kind of like doing stretches and exercises at home between visits to the gym or the rehab center.

Two weeks ago we started this series, on James (which by tradition was written by Jesus' little brother) and we saw how James begins his letter to us by saying,

“Consider it all joy when you face hard times, because hard times teach us endurance”

Yeah, yeah, easy for you to say, brother James.

AS I keep training for my marathon on Oct. 7th, I've been “suffering” on a physical level. I have to laugh at myself, it's a ridiculous thing for a woman of my age and ah-hem, *stature* to run long distances but you know what? When I started the training 15 weeks ago, five miles was a long, hard, slow slog, and I didn't know if I could do it. Fifteen weeks later, I'm 15 weeks older but now five miles is -- ***still a long hard slow slog***, but guess what, now I know I can do five miles, which I may not have been sure of before. And I know I can run 19 miles because I did it yesterday.

There's an analogy here, James says, get out there and *practice* your faith in Jesus Christ, arrange your life around Christ's teachings, attempt to *obey* Jesus – to use an old fashioned, but biblical word, you're going to find out, our big brother Jesus and His Holy Spirit, will help you to do what God commands. We can't do it by ourselves, we're too messed up for that, but Christ the Savior in us, the breath of God breathing in us, Really! We can get better at living life. No matter what our age or personal history.

John Ortberg, one of my favorite preachers, even though he's Presbyterian and not Lutheran, he does come from my home town of Rockford Illinois so he's got that going for him... John Ortberg tells how someone once asked cellist Pablo Casals –he was in his eighties already, and probably the best cellist in the world – *So why do you keep practicing for hours every day?* And Pablo Casals answered, “Because I think I'm getting better”

I love that.

Hey Trinity congregation, there's hope even though for some of us, as st paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16 “outwardly we are wasting away... still we do not lose heart. .. inwardly we are being renewed day by day” Not by our good works but by Christ inside us, by the Spirit breathing and inspiring us and giving us perseverance to do good and to be good.

We can get better at this.

Although, as Don May, the award winning swimming coach ALSO from my home town of Rockford Illinois... says, be careful, practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent. So watch out what you're practicing.

Don says he's seen many a swimmer who's gotten really *good* at swimming *badly* using a stroke pattern that's just slowin' em down... but it's the pattern they practiced, practiced practiced...

Don't just practice for the sake of practicing... practice the right way, listen to your coach

So maybe we shouldn't call him St. James, we should call him Coach James.

And last week Pastor Wayne memorably gave us some insight into the good advice from Coach James chapter two, watch out when you're practicing the life strokes for following Jesus, that you're not practicing the wrong thing, Be careful, for example, about valuing people according to how they're dressed, the jewelry on their fingers, or the sports car they drive.

Nothing wrong with jewelry or nice clothes or sleek cars,

I wish I had more of them myself...

I'll never forget the time young Dr. Gray, the new well-dressed principal at our kid's middle school was giving a pep talk to incoming students,

It was a wealthy school district in Wisconsin, and

Dr. Gray had just gotten his doctorate and a hefty raise at the school to go with it... and he said to the kids

Did you see the new shiny red Ford pick up in the parking lot? I just bought that. And if you work hard and get A's you can go on to college and you can have choices and you can buy yourself any kind of car you want.

I hated that way of looking at education - as a means to an end of buying shiny expensive stuff,
[but Dr. Gray didn't stop there]

Or - he continued -- do you want to be lazy goof off, get mediocre grades cs and d's and then you can drive a rusty little old compact like the one that was parked next to me tonight.

Well, guess who's rusty little old compact that was?

And I really wanted to tell Dr. Gray that I Christa von Zychlin had made all A's in 7th grade but buddy I had different values of how to spend my time & money & education...

"Count it all joy when you face trials... and so often trials come in the form of people, don't they? And then what comes out of our moth about those people?"

But *trials*, says Coach James from the Bible, *can produce endurance*.

But when we are irritated by others, we have to ask ourselves, How does God see this person? A person created, a person Christ died for, a person the Spirit prompts us to love, yes even a person like Dr. Gray!

The values of the world are oh so different from the values of the Kingdom of Jesus.

Read again the words of James 3:17”

“But the wisdom that comes from above leads us to be pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.”

And it’s when we START to practice the Kingdom life, that we find out how hard it IS to do the right thing, the Jesus -called -me -to -do -this thing.

Another of our church members – I hope she won’t mind my sharing her real, honest story, told me about how hard it is to practice what Jesus and Coach James teach –

“I’m really not so good inside” she said, and it could be me saying this too.

She told how a woman in a wheel chair at the grocery store asked her to help her grab something, which our church member gladly did, even though she was pretty tired herself and not in the mood to spend any extra time at the grocery store... and then the lady said oh and get me that too... and about the third time, the third thing she asked for, says this our church member,

“I kinda felt like saying, well, look lady, I didn’t come to the store to be your helper for the day...”

But she didn’t say it. She kept herself in check. And so she was practicing being “pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield full of mercy & good fruit...”

It’s like the old saying I love so much, *“You can tell how you are maturing as a Christ-like servant by how you act when people treat you like one.”*

MY immediate reaction is not to act very well – How about you?

There’s resistance to doing the right thing. And Pastor Wayne and I are the first among sinners. [he’s first I’m second ☺]

There’s resistance to putting God’s work into action, especially since God calls us to be honest and have integrity between what’s in here (head) and in our hearts and what spills out into our hands and our tongues.

As another one of our resident wisdom teachers Jerry Sims just told us just this week:

Practice and theory are the same in theory. But different in practice.

You can say that again – no where is that truer than in attempting to live the Christian life.

And so James tells us in chapter one to “count it all joy” when things get hard.

Rev. Christa von Zychlin **Count it all joy!** September 16, 2018 James 3

So it's a very simple thing James talks about in chapter three today. Mind your mouth. When you get tempted to say the mean thing –

Don't.

Don't brag.

Don't lie.

Don't curse. Especially, especially don't curse people.

Every person is precious in God's sight, including you and me, and the Dr. Grays in our life.

So let's practice that Christian love we talk about.

And God has promised Christ walks with us. We're not alone in this – it's not all up to our own efforts. The Holy Spirit breathes in us.

It might still – it will still be a long hard slow slog in this life, but we're getting stronger here and now, and we're going to be perfect in the kingdom to come. Thanks be to God.

Amen.