

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 24, 2011**

Matthew 10:34-39

Biting the Tongue

Hymns: 570 – 419

Closing: Thy Holy Wings, O Savior

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

A self-conscious wife asks her husband an important question, “Do these jeans make me look fat?” The truthful answer comes quickly to the husband’s tongue, but just as he opens his mouth to reply, he bites his tongue.

The science professor has gone full-fledged into another of his anti-Biblical rants, and the Christian in the third row has finally had enough. Just as she begins to proclaim her disagreement, she bites her tongue.

The head of the company trips and stumbles as he hurriedly ascends the stairs, the young associate walking behind him opens his mouth for a sarcastic follow-up, but decides at the last moment to bite his tongue.

To bite one’s tongue has become a common metaphor because it is something that we often do. But why do we do it? There are handfuls of reasons, I suppose. The husband might have his wife’s self-esteem in mind, the college student might not want to create an awkward situation for her classmates, the young businessman might not want his boss to feel embarrassed. More than likely, though, the reasons that we sometimes hold our speech are for more self-seeking gains. Whether it is a happy home, saving a grade, or furthering a career, we are most likely to bite our tongues when self-preservation is on the line. We can all probably think of times when we wish we would’ve bit our tongues rather than speaking out.

Today, however, we are reminded that as Christians, to bite our tongues cannot be our normal M.O. Holding back to avoid conflict or protect relationships can’t be the way that we live life. The words that Jesus spoke in our Gospel lesson make that abundantly clear. Those words and the preceding words that we heard last week were spoken

as Jesus prepared to send the 12 apostles out on their own for the first time. This was going to be their introduction to the public ministry and Jesus told them that their mission was to speak, no matter the reaction. He didn’t mince words as he said, **“Do not suppose that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”**

As we first read those words, they certainly make us take a step back. How can the Prince of Peace say that he did not come to bring peace? How can the man whose birth announcement was “Peace to men on whom his favor rests,” now denounce peace so clearly? His favorite greeting was “Peace be with you,” and he doesn’t even bring it?

Before we move on, let’s make sure we understand what Jesus meant. Certainly, Jesus came to establish peace, but it was not world peace as so many would naturally think. Jesus did not come to unite every nation on earth under one ruling banner. Instead, what he came to establish was peace between God and man by his perfect life and sacrificial death. And Jesus proclaimed boldly that He was the only way to find this peace with God. As people found that peace, it would put them at odds with those who were against it. How clearly we saw that in Jesus’ life. As crowds followed him in adoration, groups met to discuss ways to destroy his message and kill him. Jesus’ message of peace, ironically, was a sword that divided the closest of human bonds.

The same dividing message that Jesus spoke, was the one he sent his disciples out with. In Jesus’ parting words, there was to be no confusion. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that this way of peace wouldn’t be accepted by everyone they encountered. Some would hear the message that they weren’t good enough and needed help and they would be filled with joy that help was being offered. However, many would hear the message that they weren’t good enough and they would be offended. With those lines drawn, peace would be out the window. Those who are opposed to Christ would speak their mind; they would not bite their tongues. They would attack Christ and his followers in every way that they could. They would slander, they would lie, they would falsely accuse, by any means necessary. And because of that, it was necessary for those disciples of Christ to also speak though it was certain they would face rejection and persecution. Christ had put them on the battle line and the message of salvation which they spoke was their only defense.

And what was true of Jesus’ disciples then is also true of Jesus’ disciples now. He sends us out into the world to speak his message of truth no matter what the consequences might be. And he certainly gives us opportunities to do what we are sent for.

Yet, how often do you find yourself biting your tongue? I'm going to make the assumption that none of us have to spend a lot of time thinking about all the times that we know we should speak and fail to do so, so I'll ask another question: When the times come when you know you should speak or when you want to speak for Christ, what holds you back? More pointed, who are you trying to protect when you bite your tongue?

We all have things to protect. It might be family connections, friendships that we treasure, or careers built on close business associations. Have there been times when an opportunity to speak about Christ has presented itself, yet you have held back in order to protect one of those relationships?

As we all answer "Yes" to that question, we need to ask another question if we are ever going to change, "How important is Christ to me?" If Christ is only one of the many important relationships that we have in life, we will always weigh the ramifications of speaking up with all of those important relationships in mind. If I speak up about Christ with my family, how will it affect future family dinners? If I speak up when Christ is put down at work, what are the potential problems going forward? If I finally speak to my friend, will it make things awkward? Will it drive us apart? On the other side, if I bite my tongue, how will this affect this part of my life? Will it allow things to stay the same? Will it keep the peace?

If that is the scope through which we look at opportunities to speak about Christ, the outcome is easy to predict. Most often, we will protect what is in this life. We will do what we can to keep the peace and not upset the equilibrium. We do that because those results are real, they are tangible. If I upset a friend or family member or coworker, I know how that will directly affect my life. On the other hand, if I offend Christ by not speaking up when I should, I can reason that it is a relationship that is easier to recover. As much as I can tell, life will go on just like normal.

But Christ's very direct words in this text tell us that is not the case. Christ cannot be moderately important. His words of warning apply directly, **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves his brother or sister more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."** If personal effects like suffering or hardship are first on our mind when it comes to speaking for Christ, we will always keep our mouths closed. And it is at those times that we need to do some searching. If Christ is not important enough for me to speak up about, do I really see the great need that I have for him? Do I

understand just how empty life is without Christ there?

However, if Christ is most important, not just one of many important things, as we think about whether to speak, we will always weigh the results of speaking up in regards to how it affects Christ. If I speak up, will Christ's kingdom be hurt or helped? If I bite my tongue, will Christ's kingdom be hurt or helped? There are times when it might be better to hold our tongues; avoiding detrimental arguments or causing offense for a confused person, for example. But more often than not, our purpose as disciples is to speak for Christ and let him take care of the results. Of course, there are many times when our testimony will be met with resistance. It will turn people against us, dividing even the closest of ties. When that happens, it will be difficult. The devil will appeal to our most natural human emotions, those of relational love; trying to convince us not to speak. However, never be afraid to speak because Christ has told you what your words accomplish. Whether they find acceptance or rejection, Christ's will is being accomplished and we are serving as disciples for him, not for ourselves.

Whatever it brings in this life, we can be confident of where our discipleship will lead. Christ will acknowledge us as his own before his heavenly Father and eternal life will be found.

With that before you, take time to evaluate your own discipleship. As you look at how you follow Christ, be honest in what you see. Think honestly about what you want, both in this life here on earth and for your eternity. Jesus speaks clearly as he explains what his disciples can expect in this life. He speaks just as clearly as he explains what his true disciples can look forward to in heaven. Live and speak as a disciple of Christ, confident of what his followers receive.