

SPEAK LIFE

A FAST FROM NEGATIVE SPEECH!

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”
(Psalm 141:3)

A Project of:

A.M.E. Union

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Baber A.M.E. Church

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SPEAK LIFE: A FAST FROM NEGATIVE SPEECH!

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How often have we spoken death over our life or someone else’s? For example, “no one loves me” or “this will never work” or “I’ll never get out of debt?” How often have we wasted our time in conversation about other people’s private and personal affairs? How often have our self-doubts talked ourselves out of the dreams, visions, and possibilities that God has prepared for us? How often have we had to admit, “I shouldn’t have said that?”

Proverbs 18:21 states that “life and death are in the power of the tongue.” Because we often internalize the words that we and other people speak over our lives, the mission of this Lenten season is to learn how to speak life over our lives. Because we often conform our attitude and behaviors to what we profess about ourselves or others speak over us, the mission of this season is to learn how to jettison harmful speech from our life. Because time is short, the mission of this season is to learn how to mind our own business.

Our speech has the power to create realities and shape the future. So this Lenten season lets learn how to Speak Life! Let’s examine our social circles and see who we have allowed to speak into our life that we shouldn’t have allowed into our lives. Let’s examine the music, television shows, websites, and other influences that shape our attitude, beliefs, and behaviors. Let’s learn how to speak life. “Lord bridle my tongue and help me to speak life!”

SPEECH TO ELIMINATE

COMPLAINING/GRUMBLING: to murmur in discontent; to whisper dissatisfaction to others; to undermine; to always look for the bad instead of the good; to criticize in an unconstructive fashion.

GOSSIP: casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people that often involves details that are not confirmed as true; the revelation of secrets and information shared in confidence.

DOUBT: Lack of confidence in other’s abilities. Beliefs about other’s capabilities that compromises their hopes, dreams, desires, and aspirations.

SELF-DOUBT: Lack of confidence in oneself or one’s abilities. Beliefs about our capabilities that compromise our hopes, dreams, desires, and aspirations.

SLANDER: false statements that can harm or smear another person’s reputation; to smear.

SPEECH TO ADD

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 18:21 states, “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Our speech has the power to name and; therefore, create our realities. Therefore, it is so important that we speak life which is the Word of God and not death. Each participant is asked to follow this devotional booklet which is replete with Scriptures and devotions that will help us to speak life into our lives.

PRAYER: Each Monday to Friday at 6:15am, we will participate in Corporate Prayer. The prayer phone number is **(302) 202-1118**. The access code is **881577**. In addition to corporate prayer, we will fast Monday to Saturday because “prayer and fasting fit together like a hand in a glove.”

FASTING: Fasting is defined as abstinence from food (or a normal function) for spiritual purposes. While we sometimes fast as a crash diet or to prepare for a medical procedure, the motive and purpose of a Christian’s fast is God-centered. In Matthew 17, Jesus “touches” or passes the torch from himself to His disciples who are now expected to continue God’s mission and work on earth. But four verses later, in verse 21, Jesus’ disciples are unable to continue God’s mission and work on earth when Jesus’ disciples are unable to exorcise a demon from a moonstruck (in the Greek) or epileptic (in modern translations) child. Jesus tells the disciples that the reason they were unable to exorcise this demon from this moonstruck or epileptic child is because this kind come forth but by prayer *and fasting*. In other words, there are some breakthroughs that will never come unless we fast. There are some demons that will never be exorcised until we fast. There are some unwanted spirits that will never be cast out until we turn down our plate until we fast. So we will fast Monday to Saturday until Resurrection Sunday.

WHAT CAN I EAT DURING THIS FAST?

All vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and fish. Foods can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, or canned but watch for added sugars.

WHAT CAN’T I EAT DURING THIS FAST?

Meats and animal products, dairy products, sweeteners, leavened bread, refined and processed food products, deep fried foods. Members should also avoid coffee, tea, soda, alcohol, energy drinks, or any other caffeine drinks. If in doubt about a food, then don’t eat it.

CAUTION

Members who have certain dietary restrictions are encouraged to consult their physician before beginning any Daniel or other fast. In the event that a physician advises against your participation in the Daniel Fast you are asked to seek God’s direction regarding the sacrifice that is appropriate for you so that you can reach a new dimension of spiritual breakthrough and so that you can be in agreement with your brothers and sisters in Christ who are in participation in the Daniel Fast.

Monday, February 19, 2018

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

“If any man among you seems to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” James 1:26

Brother James’ implication here is that a person’s religion (faith) is marked by their speech. In fact, not only their speech but he correlates their speech directly to their heart. The words “seem to be religious” really stick out to me. So, this whole perception of who a person truly is, is based on observation. This perception may or may not be the truth. A person can speak well and have hidden evil in their heart; or they cannot speak well and have good in their heart. In order to reconcile this heart/tongue concern, the necessity to learn to manage our hearts is the first step in speaking the right words at the right time. Managing our hearts is not always an easy undertaking.

Listening to your heart is not a simple task, but when we listen to our heart we can truly find out who we are. Some ways of managing this is to think before we speak. Sayings like “Keep your tongue between your teeth”; “Think twice before you speak once”; and as Davy Crockett once said “Let your tongue speak what your heart thinks”. The Word of God reminds us that one day we will give an answer to God for every word (especially idle words) we speak.

We all know how to speak in tongues, using our tongue to speak various ways. These tongues are not unknown to any of us and are easily interpreted. For if we love to flatter, we will use a “flattering tongue” (Psalm 5:9). If we are prideful, our tongue will reflect it (Psalm 12:3; 73:9) and if we know that a soft answer turns away wrath, we will use a soft tongue, a healing and soothing tongue (Proverbs 12:18, 15:4, 25:15). A deceitful, lying, and perverted tongue is spoken of in Psalm 109:2, 120:2, and Proverbs 6:17. A mischievous, backbiting and destructive tongue is spoken of in Proverbs 17:4, 25:15, and 25:23. These are some of the tongues in which our heart is all too familiar and many times can bring us much embarrassment, pain, and shame. But use of the tongue wisely, so as not to deceive ourselves, is when we are able to reconcile our heart and our speech so that our heart and our tongue agree. Managing our heart and tongue so that they agree is not always an easy feat. However, it can be accomplished. Even silence is not always golden. There can be times in our lives that silence can be very harmful and even destructive.

I recall as a young convert, I was ready to actually tear people down, and, run them down to make them submit to this Gospel I had come to know and love and wanted them to have. However, on the first day of attending a local Bible Institute, the instructor had the class turn to Proverbs 10:19, and it tore me down. It reads “In the multitude of words, there is sin, but he that refrain his lips is wise.” When we learn to be wise, when to speak, and when not to speak, what to say, and what not to say, then our religion is not vain. Amen.

PRAYER: O for a thousand tongues to sing, our Great Redeemer’s praise. As we sing and lift God up corporately in Spirit and in truth, our tongue and our hearts gather on one accord, and together we stand in unison, striving for peace with one another and our God. Help us to have true fellowship with one another, so no one can say, our religion is vain.

Reverend Gloria Walker, M.Div., Associate Minister - AME Union Church

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

YOUR CONVERSATION DEFINES YOU

36-But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37- For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. Mathew 12:36-37 NIV

From the time we learn to speak we develop our own conversation. By definition conversation is informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc., by spoken words; oral communication between persons; talk; colloquy.

First impressions are made by initial contact through conversation. Lasting impressions are made by numerous conversations over periods of time. When you interview for employment, there is a conversation, though it may be more formal. When you leave a job, often there is an exit interview. When you receive your performance evaluations there is often some exchange through conversation. In each of these situations there are important exchange of thoughts and information by spoken word. Also, in each of these instances you are representing yourself; opinions are being formed of you, whether positive or negative. This leads me to believe that our conversation is a very important to our successes and failures and how we are perceived in society. It stands to reason that, through your conversation it is representative of who you are, or who you would like for people to think you are.

Since our conversation is vital in society, we should be very conscious how we use it, and represent ourselves. Conversation is an exchange of information. We can exchange positive or negative information. Some of the most important conversation we have is with our family and friends. We should be cautious that we're engaged in exchanging only positive information with them.

As Christians we want to be careful that we are sharing good information through all conversations. People often remember what you say and they tend to remember the negative more frequently. Our conversations should not be on empty topics just to pass time. They should be positive for someone that needs an encouraging word. We should be sharing Christ with them, as well as life's experiences that keep them from making mistakes that we've all made. As Christians we should want to have conversations that are representative of Christ, the Church and the life we are claiming to live.

CHALLENGE: Speak words that represent the life we're living. Speak words that will acquit us, not words that condemn us.

PRAYER: Merciful and everlasting God, I praise and magnify your name. I want to thank you for all you've done and all you will do. Lord please remove our empty conversations, so that we will not have to give account on judgment day. Let us live so that we can speak words that will acquit us and not words that will condemn us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Barry C. Smith, M.S., Vice Chair, Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

YOU ARE WHAT YOU HEAR; YOU ARE WHAT YOU WATCH; YOU ARE WHAT YOU READ

“For, ‘whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.’ 1 Peter 3:10

Where exactly do these evil tongues and deceitful speech from our lips originate? Is it at the exact point in time when you open your mouth? Do the words magically appear and proceed to spew from your mouths without your knowledge? Or is there something more involved – something that started long before the words from your mouth hit the airwaves for all to hear? How *do we* keep our mouths pure so that what we are saying is pleasing and acceptable to God?

We need to understand how thoughts are formed. Everything from what you hear, to what you read, to what you watch – all of these external stimuli play a role in how your thoughts are formed and, thus, what you speak and what you do.

Music that has foul language or degrades your brothers and sisters, or shows or books where the characters are cursing at each other, fighting or committing acts of fornication or adultery, then, those are the things that you put in your mind. What you put in your mind is what comes out of your mouth and ultimately, turns into your actions. Imagine you have heard a song. Several minutes – or even hours or days – later, you find yourself singing the words subconsciously.

Matthew 15:18 tells us ‘the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them’. You wonder – why am I singing this song? That is because it has been embedded in your heart.

*“Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions;
Watch your actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become character;
Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”*

The version of this poem by Frank Outlaw resonates the most with how to gain control of your life. Sometimes, you do not realize the impact of your thoughts on your future until it is laid out before you and you begin to understand the snowball effect of something as simple as watching a reality TV show.

Read James 3:2-18. This scripture provides guidance on not just how to control your tongue but also how to obtain true Wisdom.

Our Key Verse tells us, if we love life and desire to have good days, then we need to keep our tongues and watch our speech. That is an awesome tradeoff and can be easily accomplished.

Be intentional with what you hear, what you read and what you watch. Invest in those things that are going to grow and develop you and be a positive influence in your life. The reward will be a life full of love as well as the number of good days outweighing the number of bad days.

PRAYER: “Father God, make me aware of those influences that bring negativity to my life. Help me remove those things so that I will be able to hear more from You and less from me.”

Sandra D.W. Barton, Vice-Chair, Board of Stewards - AME Union Church

Thursday, February 22, 2018

JUST SAY YES!

¹² Above all, my brothers and sisters do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned. James 5:12 (NIV)

Mom once told me, Grandpa would swear by a Packard. I was thinking about that and came to the conclusion that when it came to a car, Grandpa would not buy any vehicle but a Packard. Now if you didn't understand at first, Grandpa was a devout Baptist Deacon, who put nothing before God. He just felt that it was the most dependable vehicle at the time. The Packard was American luxury cars that were produced in 1899 yet has not been manufactured since 1956. Unlike the Packard, God is still here.

In the text a matter of Truthfulness and honesty is being addressed. Our simple yes or no should be completely binding since deception is never an option for us. It's likely that the taking of oaths had become a way of manipulating people or allowing wiggle room to get out of some kinds of contracts. Yet James is definite: For those in Christ, dishonesty is never an option. Some Christians have read this command as forbidding them from taking oaths in legal settings such as courts of law or military service, but most believers see it as only a limit on personal oaths, especially those used for purposes of deception or manipulation.

So, when we swear by anything other than the Lord or God, we are doing at least two harms. First, we are facing condemnation by not simply saying yes or no. Secondly, we are setting a non-Christ-like example and putting it out there for others to see. That can lead them astray and to say that Christians are not all they are dressed up to be. So let us be mindful that others are watching us and may be making choices as a result of what they see in us.

Whom or what do you swear by? Does it point to your Christian character?

PRAYER: Almighty God, our heavenly father. Teach me to speak words that bring glory and honor to you. Help me mouth to utter words that bring you into existence in the lives of others and assist in growing your kingdom. Fix my lips to say yes or no. Let my character be known as one which does not deceive. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen.

Thomas A. DeMond, Sr., Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Friday, February 23, 2018

SWEET LIKE VINEGAR

⁹With the tongue we praise our LORD and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

¹²My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. James 3:9-12

How many times have we heard these adages: “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all,” or “You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar.”

More times than most us can even count. Clear and concise enough, the first declaration echoes the same ideals that one may have discovered in the Golden Rule: “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.” After all this is what Jesus, himself taught at the Sermon on the Mount. But Honey? Vinegar? Flies? We may find ourselves asking what does this assertion even mean. However, this statement forces us to use our cognition skills in a deeper aspect. Whether these assertions were direct reprimands we received or simply just statements that we echoed when correcting others; the light it sheds shapes the perception not only on our own individual demonstration of Christianity, but the Christian Experience comprehensively.

Everyone has a desire for their voice to be heard. What better way to be heard as a believer than to be a teacher of the gospel? Yet, James urges us to consider the power of the tongue. We must not be hasty in thrusting ourselves into a position where the tongue is constantly used. The tongue in its might can be used for great good or great evil. Perhaps better than anything else the tongue exposes the "work in progress" state of the Christian redemption. The tongue can praise or curse (verse 9-10). This hypocrisy should not be the case (verse 10-12) James is not saying that they are unbelievers because of their hypocrisy. Notice that he says, "my brothers and sisters." James is saying that such “language” is inconsistent with a life redeemed by Christ. Believers ought to be growing more consistent in their speech. We must know the source of the tongue's redemption: Redeemed speech only comes from Godly wisdom being conveyed to us. Worldly wisdom will lead to a tongue infused with bitterness that will show itself through bragging and a denial of truth. Godly wisdom will lead to pure and peaceable speech. Worldly wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic showing itself in bitter envy and selfish ambition that is accompanied by bragging and a denial of the truth. It leads to "disorder and every kind of evil." This type of wisdom and speech is our default position. Godly wisdom comes from above. It is characterized by all that is pure and peaceful. This type of wisdom only comes from God's redeeming grace. The type of wisdom and speech that governs our life displays the work of God in our hearts. Where our speech and wisdom is worldly we see that the earthly, unspiritual, and demonic is the governing authority. Where our speech and wisdom is characterized by purity and peace we see that something "from above" has taken root and is spreading through our lives.

CHALLENGE: Describe an untamed tongue. What are the effects of its pollution? How can you strive to be perfect in what you say?

PRAYER: Dear God help me in this Season to be wise in how I communicate. Allow me to see the fruits of self-control in my speech. I will speak Life as a result. Amen

Larry Foster, - Bethel A.M.E. Church, -Reading, PA

Monday, February 26, 2018

UNWHOLESOME

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:29

Have we ever said words to someone that you know was not nice? Some Christians can sometimes be negative, hostile, critical and cruel in their speech to others. There are times when we say inexcusable things to each other. Often, we use words to say cruel things. For instance “Bless His Heart” can be used in a way that tears people down instead of building them up. Sometimes we talk about things that are not our business. We share things about others that may not be true or we don’t know the full truth about the gossip we spread.

Gossiping is unwholesome. It is also sinful. Any time we engage in a conversation where we seek to build ourselves up or make ourselves look good by making others look bad, it is *UNWHOLESOME*.

The tongue is a powerful tool. We can use them to build each other up or tear them down. We were taught from an early age about using certain words and that good Christians do not use bad words. “Bad” language is about a lot more than using “curse” words. Scripture lets us know that if we keep our eyes focused on the prize and that is Jesus Christ, we would never use *unwholesome* talk about anyone unless we are trying to build them up. Can you imagine what the world would be like if we all thought about what we said to each other. There would not be anger, jealousy, envy, gossiping, animosity, but we could live in a world that God would be proud of.

CHALLENGE: Do you think God is pleased with what comes from your mouth? Have you been an inspiration to someone in their need?

PRAYER: God our Heavenly Father, help me to speak to others that will build them up and not speak words to tear them down. Let me be an inspiration that others might see the God in me through you. Heavenly Father Let the words from my mouth be acceptable in thy sight.

Eugene Crews, Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

RESTORATION REQUIREMENTS

Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. Galatians 6:1 CEB

Many commentaries suggest that Paul's chapter five, last verse, twenty-six should have been the first verse in chapter six. It reads as follows: *"But don't be conceited or make others jealous by claiming to be better than they are."*

In Galatians chapter six, Paul calls on believers to hold each other accountable and to bear one another's burdens. However, this raises several governing questions. Isn't this one of the norms of the church? This text suggests that it is not. So, why not? The language of the text does not state that Paul is suggesting that we cover up sin. Nor is Paul recommending that we sweep sin under the rug.

We've all witnessed a brother or sister believer who has been caught and cornered in sin. For instance, a brother in the church has been found in an adulterous lifestyle. A father has sinned against his family business by cheating their employees. A sister was caught cheating on her taxes. Sin is not just found in the pews, but also in the pulpit. The pastor was arrested for stealing money from the congregation. You name the sin situation and there is evidence that it has happened in every church. This is what Paul is addressing in this passage. Another governing question is do we really take sin seriously?

Paul presents ways to make sure we take sin seriously. Perhaps, it would have been easier if Paul had given us instructions and rebuked the transgressors. No that's not what Paul did. Instead Paul spends the first five verses addressing the individual who will confront the brother or sister in sin. Notice how Paul cautions the restorer that in doing so, there is the potential for the restorer to end up in the same condition that is being restored. We have the tendency to do two things: hurt people needing to be restored or we simply ignored them. Therefore, Paul states three requirements for restoration.

The most important requirement is that we must be spiritual. That means we must be in right relations with God. Second, we must be gentle, and kind. Third, we must understand the restorer must be vigilant to avoid needing restoration also. When we follow these three restoration requirements, restoration becomes a reality, and those restored return to spiritual health.

PRAYER: Omniscient God please help us to tirelessly cover in prayers and support our sisters and brothers who are vulnerable to the enticements of sin. "Restore us, O God, and remind us that you are God, and that you love us. Please accept our petitions of faith with thanksgiving. Amen.

Reverend Dr. Natalie P. Alford, M.Div., Ed.D.

Presiding Elder, Philadelphia Annual Conference, "The Historic Philadelphia Mother District"

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

GUIDELINES FOR THOSE WHO HURT US

15-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. 16-But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 17-If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector. Matthew 18: 15-17

These are Jesus' guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. They were meant for;

- (1) Christians not unbelievers.
- (2) Sins committed against you and not others
- (3) Conflict resolution in the context of the church, not the community.

Jesus' words are not a license to start an attack on every person who hurt us. They are not a license to start a “gossip campaign” or to call a church trial. They are designed to reconcile those who disagree so that all Christians may live in harmony.

When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus recommends. We turn away in hatred or resentment, seek revenge or engage in gossip. By contrast, we should go to the person, as difficult as that may be. Then we should forgive that person as often as he or she needs it (18:21-22). This will create a better chance of restoring the relationship.

We should carefully choose our words and how we communicate. Our words have an impact on those who hear them. Let's make it a positive one.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: If there's a conflict between you and another believer, do you pray before making the initial contact? If the conflict cannot be resolved, can you be at peace with the outcome and not hold a grudge against the person? Have you examined yourself to determine what you might have done to cause the conflict?

PRAYER: Eternal Father help us to be peace makers even difficult situations. Let us remember Christ died for us and rose again even though he also faced harsh and untrue accusations. You said in your word we must forgive seventy times seventy. Help us Lord to keep our eyes on you and not on our circumstances.

Carolyn Bailey, Board of Stewards - Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Thursday, March 1, 2018

IT MATTERS HOW YOU SAY IT!

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4:5-6 NIV11

Have you ever said to someone “God knows my heart”? Or ever made up some excuse for saying curse words, gossiping, or saying or doing anything you know is not appropriate because you desired to be “normal” or because you wanted to tell someone the “truth”? Maybe in front of other people who are outside the church? Well, while God knows your heart, those people you are standing in front of do not, and you could possibly be the vessel that God is trying to use to draw them closer to him. During this Lenten season, challenge your heart and mind to be more welcoming, speak kindly, and if you think that you need to tell someone the “truth”, remember that you are a representative of God. As believers and receivers of grace and mercy, we must always be willing to extend that grace to others, especially in moments of frustration. You never know who God could be using you to reach.

Challenge: Even in challenging moments practice speaking to others with grace and kindness.

PRAYER: Father, in this day and age help me to be more mindful of my speech in private and in public. In challenging moments, help me to be able to tell the truth in love and extend grace, even if it is not extended to me. Help me be welcoming to others and be in remembrance of when I first started my walk with you. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Jovan A. Moore, Licentiate and Director of Christian Education - AME Union Church.

Friday, March 2, 2018

“IT’S NOT WHAT YOU SAY; IT’S HOW YOU SAY IT.”

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger. Proverbs 15:1

The definition of communication is, “the imparting or exchange of information or news, it also means a connection between people or place in particular.”

Let’s look at the key words of the definition: “exchange of information” and a “connection between people.” A CONNECTION!!! This is something we’ve seem to have lost with each other. For example, we have Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, text messages, emails and blogs, but we have lost the basic foundation of communication.

Albert Mehrabian, a current professor of Psychology at UCLA, developed a community model that showed only 7% of what the community consist of literal of content of message. The use of such things as tone, intonation and volume take up to 38% and 55% of communication which consists of body language and we have lost touch with other.

We need to be careful how we speak to people. Remember the old saying, “You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.” In this day and age people don’t care about each other, there is something missing. When we started relying so heavily on technology something fell through the cracks and we lost touch with each other. It’s not what you say it’s how you say it. There are going to be times that we have to say some things that people will not like, but it’s how you present it to them.

Some things we need to work on getting back to:

- a. Instead of texting, talk face to face or call them. Tell them you love them.
- b. When someone is doing something you don’t like. Go to them and have a conversation one-on-one.
- c. Don’t scream or put them down. Explain how it makes you feel.
- d. Take a minute to step away from the computer and cell phone

Let us remember that God always want us to be forgiving, patient, kind and listen to each other.

PRAYER: Father God we thank you for allowing us to praise your name. Thank you for guiding us through the path of righteousness. We will remember your word is a light unto our pathway. In Jesus name, I Pray, Amen!

Mattie L. Ruth Johnson-Brannick, Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Monday, March 5, 2018

LET'S TACKLE SPREADING FALSE REPORTS

You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. Exodus 23:1

Just one look at the daily news and we can see the world is full of accusations. If we be honest we all can attest to either being a victim of false accusations or a perpetrator of spreading false reports. It starts off with Hey did you hear so and so...They did this and that. Contrary to popular belief false reports really hurt. False reports can damage reputations. False reports can drive a wedge between Christian brothers and sisters. False reports can break up meaningful friendships. More importantly, false reports can destroy lives.

If we turn our attention to Exodus 23:1 the scripture text makes it clear God calls for Christians not to engage in false reports: rumors, slander or taking things out of context. To say it another way spreading information that wrongfully charges others with wrongdoing. Notice the scripture further says “*not to join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness.*” The visual thought here is that of joining hands. False reports cannot grow unless it has one other person to survive. Teaming up or going along with the crowd against another person to be a false witness is wrong. Believe it or not the enemy is always searching to unite with others to help him accomplish his evil plan. Don't give into these temptations!

One way to inoculate against the viral spread of a false report is first begin with a personal examination. We should ask ourselves the following questions. Am I guilty of slandering others? Am I hurting others by what I say? Did I get all the facts and consider all sides of an issue before I drew damaging conclusions? Did I talk to them before I ever said anything about them? Second examine your spiritual integrity. Can I say in this instance that I am operating with a pure motive? Am I striving to live as a person with integrity? Remember when we spread malicious lies our credibility suffers as a result one's witness is tainted in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let's practice during the Lent Season not spreading false reports or rumors about people, whether at church, work, school, over the telephone or social media. Instead let's practice telling the TRUTH. God does not want his people spreading lies, but for his people to have absolute integrity. Therefore become known as a person of integrity, a person who can be trusted. Remember, God is a God who can be trusted with his word. If we confess God and God lives in us, then our words should be trustworthy and true.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, let not our heart be inclined to any evil thing. Let us not be occupied with ungodly works especially with people who work wickedness. Help us to never follow the crowd in doing wrongful acts but a light shining in dark places. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Tiffany Malone, M.Div., Licentiate and Director of Programming - AME Union Church

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE: ARE YOU SPEAKING UNNECESSARY WORDS?

Brother and sisters do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. James 4:11

We have all experienced situations in our lives where we have spoken negatively or said unnecessary words about our self and others. However, it is important that we as Christians are compassionate and empathetic to our self and others as the tongue can do damage by speaking negatively to someone or about someone. Furthermore, the tongue may produce thoughtless comments, lead to relationships being destroyed, produce feelings that others do not matter, and result in damaged reputations.

We will face challenges in life as our faith grows. The range of these challenges will be with family members and issues in the workplace, to difficulty with people in general. Nevertheless, think about how many times you have spoken negatively over your life, saying “I’m not going to get the promotion, I’m not smart enough, I’m not pretty or handsome enough, I will never get out of debt, and my family is a hot mess...” How often has someone told you, “You will never amount to anything, No one likes you, you don’t fit in, and I don’t know why you are doing that because it will never happen...?”

Christians must not practice thinking we are insignificant and what we do for ourselves as well as others is not important. Do not let anyone drown your dreams and you should not be drowning the dreams of others by talking negatively or sitting on the sidelines allowing others to talk negatively about someone without speaking up. We have to be mindful of what we say to others as well as how it’s said as we could be the person that leads an individual to making a life or death decision. Christians must be found encouraging one another as well as one’s own self by speaking positive words.

Surround yourself with positive people and continue to pray for and speak life to those persons that are negative. If this is hard, pray and ask God to help you be the Christian he wants you to be. We are never too old to keep growing and working toward the goal of being someone that speaks love and encouragement, forgives others and shows compassion which will lead to positive speech.

Regardless of how we feel about a situation or an individual, we should always reflect like this;

- What good can come from speaking or making this statement about me or someone else?
- How would others be affected by the words that I say?
- How will others view me as I am a reflection of Jesus?

PRAYER: Heavenly father we ask you to influence our tongue and attitudes. I pray as we continue on in faith we embrace change and that as our relationship with you evolves we will be disciples that speak life not only to ourselves but to others. Amen

Elona Charles, Board of Stewards - Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

THE POWER OF OPINION

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Matthew 7:3-5

Devotion: So much of our powerful connection to one another is wrapped up in our personal opinions. Majority of the time we form opinions separate from our own authentic experiences in life, therefore it is easy to be judgmental. It’s rare for us to view someone from a place of “putting yourself in their shoes” at the onset, so that you can extend grace toward others for what they are facing in their lives. To be self-righteous is easy; all it takes is pointing the finger. Are you curious about how your relationships with your “brother” could flourish if you were deliberate in first taking “the plank out of your own eye” so that you can build your relationships based upon the Word of God as described in Matthew 7:5b “then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Creating relationships with your brothers & sisters based upon the instructions of this Scripture plants vision and actions of love that deepens bonds. Bonds that cannot be broken by nonsense, disagreements, and empty arguments based upon assumptions and heartless opinions. Clearly I am not speaking of making excuses for others, I am challenging you to extend grace to your brothers and sisters so that they might experience what it is to truly bond with another.

PRAYER: Father, in the name of your son Jesus, we thank You for Your divine instructions of how to love one another. And ultimately, how to be used by You to represent who You are for us when we need You the most. These Scriptures reveal to us who we are, and how easy it is for us to tear one another down, yet today we declare that we have been shown your way and we will love on one another, Your way! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen!

Kim Yvonne Billups, Licentiate and Church Administrator - AME Union Church

Thursday, March 8, 2018

TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK....THAT IS THE QUESTION

The one who conceals hatred has lying lips and whoever utters slander is a fool. Proverbs 10:18

In the Shakespeare's play Hamlet, Hamlet utters this phrase-"To Be or Not to Be...That is the Question." When Hamlet uttered those words, he was contemplating and weighing the benefits of life (to be) and death (not to be).

I believe with this same sense of contemplation we should pause before we speak to determine whether what we say will bring about life or death.

If we look at the first portion of the focal verse. it appears that one can speak life affirming words to someone yet inwardly harbor hatred towards that same individual. This is pretty much an indication that those words were just talk and not a true indication of how they truly felt and therefore a lie. It would have been better for them *not to speak* at all because while they may fool man, God see and knows the heart.

In the second portion of the verse it deals with one who uses slanderous speech towards someone else. This person is referred to as a fool. Proverbs 18:7 ESV states that a fool's mouth is his ruin and a snare to his soul. So if we engage in slandering someone else, we are in essence endangering our own soul. Who are we to slander anyone for we all have fallen short and a lot of times slander is rooted in untruths and simply spreading gossip. We would do well to remember our childhood teaching that if we don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. If we must address someone about anything, we must *speak* the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

In closing here is a quote from Plato... Wise men speak because they have something to say, Fools speak because they have to say something.... (I'm sure Plato dropped the mic after this quote!) So let us be Wise and not a Fool as we ponder whether or not *to speak or not to speak*.

PRAYER: Father God in the name of Jesus, bridle my tongue and let my words edify, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen Amen and Amen

Yvondria Thomas, Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Friday, March 9, 2018

YOUR WORDS CAN HELP OR HARM YOU

“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” Proverbs 18:8

It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is for some to use their words to hurt people. Have you ever heard someone use their words to tear others down? Amazingly, we choose to use our words in harmful ways. Proverbs is a book that shares various words of wisdom. It gives us great guidance about how and when we should use the power in our words. Unfortunately, we live in a world where words are used to hold people hostage to lies.

A talebearer is one who has every intention to hurt with their words. I remember learning this saying: Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Well beloved, words can be very hurtful. As people of faith, we must be mindful that God has called us to love our neighbor. If I love my neighbor, I do not want to hurt them. If I love my neighbor, their hurt is my hurt. What is so interesting about this passage is the fact that the words *go down into the innermost parts of the belly*. The Hebrew word to describe this place is *Beten* which can be translated *The bottom of the heart* or *The deepest recesses of the individual*. As we move into this Lenten season our hearts and minds must be geared toward restoration and healing. Jesus was sent to bring restoration and healing to a world that did not know how lost they really were. Some of us do not know how lost we truly are. Our words, our actions, our intentions all point to our need to be saved from ourselves. What would you say is that state of your innermost part of your belly? How would you describe the bottom of your heart? Have you asked God to touch the deepest recesses of who you are? Maybe someone has used words to hurt you and now you have learned to do the same to others. Maybe your heart's desire is to be healed from your inability to control your tongue instead of it controlling you. I encourage you to look at yourself during this time and ask yourself some hard questions about how you use your words for yourself as well as for others.

There are tales that we speak over our own lives that hinder our blessing. Amazingly, we can be our own talebearers that speak negativity into the innermost parts of our own belly. God has blessed us with the ability to talk to God about any and everything. I encourage you to be honest with yourself and be honest with God about the words that come out of your mouth. Spend time with God and allow the sweetness of the Holy Spirit to bring kindness to your words and wisdom to how you use those words. Jesus came so that we could have abundant life; do not allow harmful words to keep you or those that you encounter to have anything less than what Jesus said we can have. Choose your words wisely, for they can make or break your spirit.

PRAYER: Gracious and Loving God, thank you so much for your loving kindness. I thank you God for the Word that bring healing and wholeness to my life. Help me to honor who you are in my life through my words as well as my actions. Help me decrease God that you might increase in my life. I love you and I trust you. In Jesus Name, Amen

Reverend Dr. A'Shellarien Lang, Pastor, Bethel AME Church, Cookstown, NJ

Monday, March 12, 2018

SPEAK CAREFULLY: OUR SPOKEN WORDS WILL NOT BE RETURNED EMPTY.

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).”

So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

There is a very sweet eighty-year-old senior citizen, a widow, who we are going to call Sally. Everyone only has kind comments when referring to Sally. People enjoy Sally's company. Sally attends church regularly and she prays faithfully to and with our Lord and savior. However, Sally had a long time old friend Lulu, a very close friend who did not share all of Sally's Christian values. Lulu was a bit of a gossip. She always saw the flaws in others and spoke of them loudly and shamelessly. One of those friends. One day a kind church member was visiting Sally at her home. She visited Sally often. When the visitor was leaving, Lulu was arriving. Lulu commented on the size of the visitor and her clothes as she entered Sally's home. Her words were mean and hurtful and unfortunately the visitor heard the inappropriate language as she entered her car. Sally giggled and agreed with Lulu. Now Sally really liked the visitor, she enjoyed the visits very much. But Sally without even thinking, quickly got caught up in the moment and joined in with Lulu and spoke harmful words. The visitor was shocked by Sally's response and words. Lulu died shortly after this incident. Several weeks later, Sally noticed that the visitor had not visited her in a while. Sally was lonely and depressed because she didn't exercise “self-control” and her hurtful words were out there. Sally's words were out there.

Can we speak harmful words quickly, without thought, without consequences? Our spoken words will not be returned empty!

God's Spirit helps us control our thoughts and actions. Jesus could have easily stopped the people from crucifying Him (Matthew 26:53). But He had the self-control to do exactly what God asked Him to do, even through all that pain and suffering. The reason Jesus had this amazing self-control was because Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus spent as much time as He could with our Heavenly Father. The more time we spend with our Heavenly Father, the more good fruit God will grow in our lives.

CHALLENGE: Titus 2:12 states God's grace teaches us to say no to godless ways and sinful longings. We must control ourselves. We must do what is right. We must lead godly lives in today's world.

PRAYER: Gracious God, help us to live in accordance with Holy Spirit. Help us to exercise the attribute of self-control which means carefully choosing our words because our spoken words will not be returned empty. For every action there is a reaction. During this season of Lent, which is a time of reflection, help us to be still. Father, help us to select words that reflect you Heavenly Father through the example of your son Christ Jesus, Amen.

Lisa Young, Ph.D., Board of Stewards - Baber A.M.E. Church

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

IT'S TIME TO MEDITATE

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14 NIV

The familiar hymn says, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” The imagery of standing on the security and immovability of Jesus Christ’s teachings sustains us as Christians. But, as we live in this fast-moving world, do we catch ourselves when our Christian walk gets sloppy?

Do we feel the rebuke of the Spirit when the words of our mouths dishonor Christ? Do we wake enough to reign in our minds when we are sinning by thought? I know this writer has a heart for honoring Christ. I know he has found out over the years that a good intention to honor Christ and making room for devotion takes time. What is meditation really about?

There are several ways to meditate: contemplative thought, journaling, prayer, and utilizing a labyrinth (or finger labyrinth) are just a few. To be effective, all require dedicated time to descend into the core of our concerns. If we hope to foster spiritual wellness that honors Christ, we must invest time.

If not, we might think we are standing on Christ, however, uttering foolishness, and murdering our brothers and sister in our minds. We are not standing on Christ the solid rock—no, we are just standing on a sidewalk headed to quicksand.

PRAYER: Lord, let the words I speak and the thoughts upon which I meditate in my heart, be acceptable to you, the one who strengthens and redeems me! Amen!

Reverend Richard Moran, M.Div., Associate Minister, -Bethel A.M.E. Church, Schenectady, NY

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

GOD'S WORD IS ALL WE HAVE

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.”

Isaiah 40:8

Seasons come, and seasons go. Think about the beauty of spring as the flowers bloom, yet the flowers would not bloom without the snow that saturates the ground in the winter. Remember the beautiful autumn leaves that fall to the ground as we move from summer to winter. Even though those leaves are falling, they serve a purpose as their nutrients fertilize the soil before the snow covers them. Nature has a way of preserving itself by working together. Even with all the falling, the leaves stand as a beautiful example of God's divine plan. God's plan for nature is no different than God's plan for our lives. One season in our life builds upon another season in our life. Some may be cold, some may involve falling, and some may require us to be buried for a time so that we can blossom. What would happen if the leaves started screaming at the trees for letting them fall? What would happen if the soil told the leaves to get off of them? God's plan would not prevail.

Isaiah 40 brings words of comfort for those who feel fallen and covered like those leaves. Unlike the leaves, we have the ability to scream at those who we think are harming us. We have the ability to use our words to get people off of us. Beloved, there are times when we need to consider that our words do not bring comfort. There are times when we use our words to hurt because we are hurt. As we move into this Lenten season, Isaiah is sharing with us that no matter what our circumstances are, what God says about us does not change. Jesus was sent to show us a better way. Jesus could have screamed at God for letting him come down to a place to die for a people who did not even believe. Jesus could have told our sins to get off of Him. Yet, He chose to fall and to be covered in our sins in order for us to be restored to a right relationship with God. Isaiah says that *God's word shall stand forever*. Our words and our actions must line up with the truth about what God says about us. We cannot speak against what God says is true. The truth is God loves us, the truth is Jesus was sent for all of us, the truth is the Holy Spirit can keep us if we want to be kept. Speak God's truths over your life no matter what season of life you are in. Whether you are falling, whether you are being covered up, or whether you are blooming let the word of God stand in your life. You never know who is watching and you never know who wants to live better because they see you live better. Honor God with all of who you are and let the word of God manifest in your life so that you can stand knowing that God is pleased with who you are becoming.

PRAYER: Gracious and Loving God, thank you so much for your Omnipotence. I thank you God for the seasons, which are ordered to nurture abundant life. Help me to honor who you with patience, trust, and understanding, as I navigate the more difficult seasons. In Jesus Name, Amen

Reverend Dr. A'Shellarien Lang, Pastor, Bethel AME Church, Cookstown, NJ

Thursday, March 15, 2018

WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?

⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 NIV

The book of Romans is a series of letters that Paul is writing to the Roman Church. In these letters he explains to the church their mission. When we are reading and attempting to gain an understanding for the key verse above Romans 10: 9, we are quick to say this should be our confession. But the question is what does this confession really mean, and how does it relate to a mission.

Romans 10:9 says, **"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord"...."** In Proverbs 18:21 it says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Since we breathe life into something through our words, the declaration that, "Jesus is Lord" should be the first thing that a believers and non-believer should have written on their hearts. Furthermore, in the verse Paul writes, **"...and believe in your heart...."** The heart is muscle that keeps the rest of you going, without your heart you would not be able to walk, talk, breath, run, or shout. It is important that we have this declaration that "Jesus is Lord" on our heart, because without it what keeps us going in our faith may come into question. We have declared who Jesus is, we have written it on our heart so it a part of our everyday living. Now we must continue to declare what Jesus did for us which is give us salvation, which is stated at the end of this verse, **"...that God raised him from the dead you will be saved."** Through this final part of our declaration we have made out confession of who Jesus is and where he is in our lives.

Jesus is essential to our lives just like our heart. He has placed us on a mission to have others make this declaration of confession to believe he was raised from the dead, so they will be saved. No matter how far we go from the Lord this is always our mission.

CHALLENGE:

1. How can you demonstrate my mission throughout your daily life?
2. Who can you bring to Christ using this simple verse of declaration?
3. What does this declaration mean to you?

PRAYER: Lord we thank you for this day and we thank you for letting us see another day. We ask that you open our hearts and minds to be bold enough to complete your mission. Give us the Holy Ghost boldness to bring lost souls to dedicate and rededicate their lives to you. Lord let those around us see that you are written on our hearts and see that we are saved. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Alexis Parker, Licentiate - Baber A.M.E. Church

Friday, March 16, 2018

HEART CHECK

“The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

Luke 6:45 NRSV

“Flowing from my heart, Are the issues of my heart...”

Before you finish the lyrics, let's do a heart check. What is actually flowing from your heart? Let's roll up our sleeves and get past the surface. What's really in your heart today? What was on your heart last night? Is it joy and kindness? Peace and long suffering? Is it actual gratefulness, even in the face of frustrating circumstances? Or, is there a little bitterness? Anger or any lingering grudges you are holding? Maybe a little pettiness? A long time ago, a very wise woman told me to watch what I allow my mind to focus on because what you focus on gets stored in your heart, and eventually comes out of your mouth. Oftentimes, when we say things that are less than kind to others and we use phrases such as “You made me (insert the negative words or actions)”, the truth is, it was already in your heart and on your mind to say. Before you have your next conversation, stop and do a heart check. See what is actually there and if it will not glorify God, work to change your thoughts and your speech. If it does not speak life into your situation or someone else's change your focus and your speech.

HEART CHECK: What's really on my heart and mind? If it is not positive, how can I alter it to become positive?

PRAYER: Father, your word says “let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight” (Psalm 19:14) Help me to train my thoughts, my mind, and heart to focus on the things that will glorify you in my speech. When I am not able to glorify you help me to come before and lay these issues are your feet.

Jovan A. Moore, Licentiate and Director of Christian Education - AME Union Church.

Monday, March 19, 2018

“YOU ONLY GET OUT - WHAT YOU PUT IN”

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

Once long ago, I recall being in trouble for something I said while in the presents of adults. I cried, “Grandma I didn’t mean it, it just came out!” To which she replied, “You only get out, what you put in Boy!” I knew better than to disagree. But the truth is, my grandmother knew something then that it would take me years to learn. When you put good in, you’ll get good out. And if bad comes out of you; your thoughts, your words or your deeds; it’s likely because you weren’t careful about what you were putting in.

The scripture reference above brings us to the church at Philippi. It was in Philippi where Paul met people who would become lifelong friends and supporters for his mission work. The region of Philippi was filled with retired Roman soldiers. These soldiers had likely traveled all over Rome’s conquered lands and had seen the worst things, and likely did some of those awful things. Yet here, we find Paul writing words to encourage readers of his letter in Philippi. His message to them was simple: **God is a God of peace**. As a result God gives us power to have experience peace, even in the worst of times.

Ultimately Paul, via his letter, encourages readers to spend time doing things within their control. The reality is that we may not be able to control what happens around us, we may not even be able to control what happens to us - but we can *always* control what we allow inside of us. Spend your time thinking on things that God loves. If you spend time putting good in, good is sure to come out.

PRAYER: Eternal God, we thank you for this time of fasting and feasting on your word. We thank you for your Son Jesus Christ and for his living example of a life free from negative speech. God I pray that you would fill my heart with things that you love; Keep my mouth from speaking wickedness, slander, lies, deceit and hopelessness. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Reverend Jonathan R. Stafford, Associate Minister - Baber A.M.E. Church

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

TRANSFORMING TO LOOK LIKE GOD

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Romans 12:2

A Rose by any other name is still a Rose. “Spilling the tea” is gossip; “Throwing shade” is backbiting. “My Thursday Night” or “My Side Chick/Dude” while married is still adultery. “Kicking it” while single is still fornication. Any addiction named, is still more than likely tied to lust/greed. “Hating” “Being A Hater”, and “Drinking Haterade” is still envy, jealousy, and related to murder. “Having it my way” and “I did it my way” is still not “God’s way”.

Living in a world of social media, “turning up” being “on and poppin”, “busting a cap” (maybe that’s old), and writhing on the floor with serpent like movements and snake skin clothing is acceptable and a legitimate form of entertainment today. Even presidents today approve their own illicit behavior and have many supporters in their immoral, unethical lifestyles. I am beginning to be reminded of a day that “everyone did as they saw fit” and did as they thought it to be right in their own mind. Conformity to this world and all its worldly ways, lifestyles, and acceptances has long been proven that it does not have to be good to feel good, it does not have to be right to be accepted, it does not have to be perfect (or moving towards perfection), and who cares about the will of God as long as it is good enough to them.

Where is the collective consciousness of this country? What in the world is going on in our minds? Who is really setting standards these days? How are these standards being instilled in our youth and young adults? How do these standards become so appealing to middle and senior adults that they are willing to just go along? Non-Conformity to this world is viewed as eccentric and aloof and one may soon find that they are ostracized from the in crowd. The old adage that “If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything” is still relevant.

I am always encouraged when someone (especially a younger person) asks me questions about the Bible and even more encouraged when they ask me to give them Scriptures that will help them in their daily situations. I get happy because I know that the Word of God gives life and invigoration, and inspiration in a way that nothing else can. Once it enters our minds, thoughts and consciousness, we don’t only have a change, but we actually change. The more we read and take in, the more change occurs. We change from the old into the new beings that 2 Corinthians say we are. The change happens from the inside out and is a spiritual change, yet it is reflected not only on the inside in our hearts, but it is seen on the outside by others. We become a new being with a new mind, and new thoughts, and new desires. Our mind becomes renewed. The more we take in and digest the Word of God, the more we can prove and test what is really good, what is really acceptable, and what is really perfect, and what is the will of God. The Word of God is the only source that I know of that can consistently prove if we are being transformed or if we are still conforming to the world, our friends, and or any other pressures from without. Get your mind right through the Word of God!

PRAYER: Lord, Help me to Change for the better! In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.

Reverend Gloria Walker, M.Div., Associate Minister - AME Union Church

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

THE SECOND ACT

²² That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; ²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24 KJV

Growing up as the only girl in our family, my grandmother taught me modesty; such as how to change clothes without being noticed. She did this by telling me a story about her days as a performer on vaudeville. “You see, in those days the African American performers did not have dressing rooms, so we changed costumes backstage in front of everyone.” Grandma’s backstage change demonstration went sort of like this; “First you put the new costume on loosely over the old clothes and then you slipped the old clothes off”. I tried it and it really worked. But what I really wanted to know was why it was necessary for the performers to change clothes during their performances. She told me, “Sometimes we would have to change our clothes because we were playing a new role and moving to the next act.” “That’s silly”, I said, “The audience will still remember your face so why does it matter?” “Because when you change your costume and go back on stage your change of clothes means you are going to be doing something totally new.” But if you did not change your clothes the audience would think that it was just a continuation of what was in the First Act.” So, putting on a new costume means the performer is going to be performing something new.

Before we became Christians we too were in the first act as we were doing some old stuff that was good for the first act. However, as Christians we take off the old costume the old ways of acting, of speaking and we slip on the new life, the mind, the new speech. So that when we present ourselves back on stage, to our family, on our job, and to our communities everyone will notices that there is something new about us, that we may look the same on the outside we have a new attitude, that we represent a new way of life, a life that exemplifies Christ. While changing a costume backstage seems like changing your life there are some differences for example; changing costumes from the first act to the second act in a performance may mean you will have to change back and forth each time you perform this play. But as a Christian when you take off the old and slip on the new mind you ought not to ever go back to the first act. There is no need for us to act, talk, walk, or even think the way we did before we entered the second act. The new mind is the mind that we keep forever. It is our new way of life, it is the only life that leads to everlasting life, it is the only life that promotes health, healing, and spreads the good news of Christ to all. It is the last and final act. Keeping the new way of life means that when the final curtain closes we will only have one more change from mortal to immortal.

QUESTION: Have you had the opportunity to exam your costume: your mind your speech, your thinking, is it appropriate for the second act? Is there something you need to change?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to see how we are living, how we are speaking, and how we are thinking. Help us to change to what represents our new life, Amen.

Reverend Denise Lynn Smith, Associate Minister - Baber A.M.E. Church

Thursday, March 22, 2018

ONLY WHAT YOU DO FOR CHRIST WILL LAST

“Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.” Colossians 3:2

Many people have set their sights on the here and now, on the things that are temporal, and give little to no regard of futuristic things. The future is not always 30 and 40 years down the line. Sometimes the ‘future’ is as close as 6 months or even next week and many are not prepared to deal with what the future holds. It has been stated that we live in a “Microwave” society. We want *what* we want, *how* we want it, and, most importantly, *when* we want it. People have grown very impatient because they are accustomed to this mentality.

Years ago, the Kraft Heinz[®] Company had a slogan that said ‘good things come to those who wait’. It was basically a warning to its customers that they would have to wait a little while to enjoy the goodness of its product. However, they believed the wait would be well worth it!

God has shared a similar slogan with us. He told us to set our minds on Heaven because that is the only thing that will last forever and it is definitely well worth the wait. Although we do not always think that ‘threescore and ten years’ is temporary, or that it is a short amount of time, but that is the allotment of time that God said would be the number of our days (Psalm 90:10). With that in mind, measure 70 years against eternity and you will soon begin to realize the brevity of our time on earth. Therefore, it would be in our best interest to prepare for the period in our lives where we will spend the majority of our time – and that is in the life after our time here on earth.

You may be wondering – How do I prepare for the unknown? How do I ensure that my afterlife is full of all that God has to offer? What can I do to secure my place in Heaven? That is when you turn to the Bible to see the instructions that God has provided to have a great ‘retirement’.

Realize that your journey to Heaven begins now. You must strive to put Heaven’s priorities into practice on a daily basis. You have heard that we should read and study the Bible every day. We will receive instruction through this very act. Then, we should look for ways to act on what we have learned. Do you encounter anyone who may ask you to assist them with getting something to eat? Isaiah 58:10 tells us to feed the hungry. Has anyone asked you to help them get clothes to wear, maybe to a job interview? Matthew 25:36 tells the story of someone who provided clothing to their neighbor. Are you involved with ministries that visit prisons? Hebrews 13:3 instructs us to remember those who are imprisoned as if we were also in prison with them. These are just a few but there are many more.

PRAYER: “Dear Lord, help me to fix my mind on what is most important in this world, on those things that will last an eternity. Let me make a difference in the lives of others, which, in turn, will make a difference in my life.”

Sandra D.W. Barton, Vice-Chair, Board of Stewards - AME Union Church

Friday, March 23, 2018

Remain Connected

“I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” John

Have you ever received or seen cut flowers? Perhaps a bouquet of roses on Valentine’s Day, a wreath on a door, or even flowers placed on the altar on Sunday. If you have received or seen cut flowers, can I ask you a question? How long do flowers last apart from the plant bearing it? Cut flowers have a limited life. Branches don’t last long apart from the larger tree or plant to which they were attached.

Just like a plant, people of faith cannot survive apart from each other and God. Matter-of-fact, apart from God and each other, we quickly become useless, wither and die.

D.L. Moody, a great American evangelist and pastor, often told the story of a member that quit coming to church. He went to visit the member in his home and sat with him in front of the fireplace. After the member stated why he quit coming to church, Moody did not respond. But instead he leaned over and raked a red-hot coal out of the fireplace. Moody and the member both sat there silently and watched as the piece of coal cooled down, soon becoming cold and black. Meanwhile, the other coals in the fireplace continued to burn and radiate with heat.

Our lives, apart from God and each other, are like the piece of coal outside the fireplace. We quickly become cold, lose our fervor, and lose our love for God, and God’s creation. So my recommendation to you is this: Remain Connected! Nurture your relationship with God. Have constant communication with God. Chase after God. Listen to God. Remain in God’s Word. Remain connected!

PRAYER: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” We need you God. Apart from you we are nothing. Apart from you we will fail. So please don’t leave us alone. But walk with us. Talk with us. Hold our hand. Keep us forever in thy path we pray. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

The Reverend James C. Simmons, Pastor
Baber African Methodist Episcopal Church, Rochester, New York

Holy Week

Holy Week or Passion Week is the week that precedes Resurrection Sunday. This week chronicles Jesus' final days on earth that initiates with His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the following Sunday's dawn when two Galilean women discover Jesus' empty tomb. These Scriptures chronicle Jesus' steps and invites readers to experience this transformative journey with Him.

Sunday, March 25, 2018: Jesus' Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 18:28-44, John 12:12-19

Monday, March 26, 2018: Clearing of the Temple

Matthew 21:10-17, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-48

Tuesday, March 27, 2018: Day of Controversy and Parables

Matthew 21:23-24, 51, Mark 11:27-13:37, Luke 20: 1-21, 36

Wednesday, March 28, 2018: Day of Rest

The Scriptures do not mention this day, but counting of the days (Mark 14:1, John 12:1) seems to indicate there was another day which the Gospels record nothing about (NIV Study Bible).

Thursday, March 29, 2018: The Last Supper

Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-16, Luke 22:7-23, John 13:1-20

Friday, March 30, 2018: Crucifixion (Good Friday)

Matthew 27:1-66, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 22:66-23:56, John 18:28-19:37

Words have Power
SPEAK LIFE!