

Tough Talk!

Isaiah 50^{4-9a}; Psalm 116¹⁻⁸; James 3¹⁻¹²; Mark 8^{27-end}

*With [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father,
and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. [James 3⁹]*

I apologise that I am not Canon Dr Paula Gooder - we send her our best wishes for a recovery from the chest infection that means she is unable to be here. I do wonder what she would have made of these readings.

Which is the easiest thing in the readings today? To take up your cross and follow Jesus? Or, to tame your tongue?

If we were honest, we probably would opt for taking up our cross - because somewhere at the back of our mind if we take something up we can put it down and get a break!

WHAT? You want a cross with detachable nails (or perhaps with velcro so that it is less invasive)?

So you want to remain in control of what happens to you?

That is the challenge that James sets before us - so control what you say! How are we doing with this?

We all know that what we say can be so positive - Isaiah suggests that **the tongue of a teacher can sustain the weary with a word!**

But consistency is hard to achieve: as James tells us - With the tongue **we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.**

Part of our crucifixion - because that is what carrying our cross means - is that we are, in every part of our living, consistently Christian. What else can Jesus invitation to **deny yourselves** mean? The easiest evidence of this is what we say!

The encounter between Jesus and Peter is just that - if you are prepared to say **You are the Messiah** you don't follow that up by thinking you can correct Jesus: [Peter] **took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him.**

In just one moment Peter learns what James means when he speaks about the power of what we say:

- ✦ The tongue is the rudder that steers our course.
- ✦ He compares it to the spark that starts a forest fire - the tongue **is itself set on fire by hell.**
- ✦ With spoken commands we seem to be able to direct what other creatures are able to do - without controlling ourselves.
- ✦ It isn't all bad - **from the same mouth come blessing and cursing** - but it isn't consistent: discipleship is about consistently following Jesus. James makes the point that a **fig tree** doesn't **yield olives** in the same way that **olives** don't grow on a **vine**, or **salt water** isn't the same as **fresh** water!

Maybe we should nail our tongues to the cross first and then consistent discipleship might come more easily??!

Becoming a Christian is easy - being a Christian isn't!