

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Joining Jesus On His Mission*
Service Theme: *Flavor Your Speech*
Sermon Theme: *You Glorify Jesus with that Mouth?*
(May 14, 2023) Colossians 4:2-6

Your mom cares about what you say. If you remember a time when your mother washed your mouth out with soap after a particularly colorful word, or particularly disrespectful words escaped your lips, you might remember that truth by a particularly disgusting flavor! Or maybe you've heard the question—hopefully not directed toward you!—“***You kiss your mother with that mouth?***” People say that phrase to someone who's the king or queen of cursing; someone who says things that make their hearers blush; someone whose speech is so inappropriate, it could only be described as “salty” language. And therefore, speaking such offensive things makes your mouth unqualified to kiss your sweet, innocent, mother—who cares about what you say.

But while today is Mother's Day, and we certainly honor our mamas, we're not as worried about what they think about our speech as we are about what God thinks about our speech. Because God cares about what you say too!

Our speech is another critical aspect of Joining Jesus on His Mission. Obviously, when we proclaim God's Word to people, our words are important because the Holy Spirit works through that Word to change people's hearts! But even beyond speaking God's Word, our words are impactful for Jesus' mission of winning souls for the Kingdom of God.

We understand the power words can have. Just think how telling a worker, “You're doing a great job!” can completely change their day. How explaining a concept to a student in a way they can understand can completely change their grasp of a subject in school. How saying “Yes” instead of “No” to a marriage proposal completely changes people's futures. Or in reverse, think how just one word can crush a

person's self-image—fat, stupid, ugly, worthless. How someone never saying “I love you” to their spouse or child can leave so much in doubt. How one simple command from a world leader could start World War III. Words have immense power, either for good or bad. That's why in his letter, James compares the tongue to a small spark that can set an entire forest on fire, or the little rudder that steers a huge ship. The tongue is a small part of the body, but in speaking, it has transformative power.

That's also true when it comes to Joining Jesus on His Mission. Our speech is capable of either driving people away from hearing the words of Jesus, or of drawing people closer to hearing the words of Jesus. That's why God's Word encourages us today, **Flavor Your Speech**.

In his letter to the Christians in the city of Colosse, the Apostle Paul instructs, “***Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.***” So, while we said earlier that having salty language will sometimes get your mouth washed out with soap, Paul encourages us to have “salty” language! That makes sense, because Jesus tells his followers, “***You are the salt of the earth,***” and “***Have salt in yourselves.***”

But what exactly does that mean to have our conversations seasoned with salt? As you probably know, in Paul's refrigeration-free day, salt was a valuable commodity for its use as a preservative—to prevent food from spoiling. And that gives us a little insight on what “salty language” sounds like.

You probably realize culturally today just how negative, degrading, gossipy, and attacking people's speech is. Just look at the comments section of any online news article; talk to those from the other side of the aisle protesting at a political campaign; ask a Gators fan how they feel about Seminoles fans. People are quick to take people's words and actions in the worst possible way; to attack and tear down those who are different or think differently than them. And like an incendiary little spark, when we hear the speech of the world around us, it's easy to follow suit, like the mob mentality on a middle school playground,

as one kid getting picked on by the bully suddenly is getting picked on by a mob of his peers.

But what an impact it can have when someone takes the opposite tact? Instead of joining in on the attacks, or answering in kind, instead sticking up for a person and not jumping to conclusions; instead speaking in love and forgiveness instead of attacking and degrading. That makes people notice, doesn't it? And in fact, sometimes that one voice who speaks different from the crowd actually leads people away from the crowd and to follow their lead, doesn't it? That "salty language" can help to prevent everything from becoming spoiled and corrupted. That's why earlier in Colossians, Paul encourages them, ***"Rid yourselves of... anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips."*** Because our words have impact, for good or bad!

And as anyone whose doctor tells them they need to better control their sodium can tell you, salt also tastes good! Salt brings out flavors and makes things taste better. Salt is desirable! That's why it's so hard to pass up a bowl of popcorn, or why you can't eat just one Lays Potato Chip. So salty language is the kind of language that draws people in.

We all probably know people whose speech is super negative. They always have a doom and gloom perspective on everything, and they rarely talk without complaining about something that's going on in their lives. How do you feel around those people? My guess is, you probably try to avoid talking to them; and when you get stuck working a shift with Debbie Downer, you end up feeling really negative and complaining too. Compare that to those people you know who have a joyful attitude. People who always have a positive outlook and perspective on life, even during hard times. They're encouraging, uplifting, joy just exudes from their words. Those are the kind of people you want to be around, right? The kind of people you gravitate towards, and who fill you with a sense of joy and positivity too.

When it comes to Joining Jesus on His Mission, talking with people and building relationships is half the battle! Which kind of speech do

you think will give you better opportunities to keep those conversations going? What type of speech coming from your lips is going to bring people to ask, "How are you always so positive and joyful?" which gives you the prime opportunity to bridge the conversation to Christ! So, flavor your speech with the salt of the Gospel!

The other encouragement Paul gives is, ***"Let your conversation be always full of grace."*** In Paul's day, secular people also used the term "gracious speech," referring to people whose speech was dotted with witty, clever remarks and observations. Which meant, what they thought was most important was being an interesting conversationalist. But as he often does, Paul takes a secular term and turns into a Jesus term.

To have our conversations be always full of grace means that our speech should be the obvious result of the operation of God's grace in our hearts. It means that our speech will be patterned after Christ! Which means it's so much more than just not cursing or using swear words. That's part of it, but it's so much more. Just listen to Christ, as he responds to his enemies' mocking and jeering his death by praying, ***"Father, forgive them."*** Listen to Jesus as he defends a sinful woman from a mob mentality death, by inviting, ***"Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."*** Listen to Jesus as he shows genuine care to the weak, the rejected, the downtrodden, the overlooked. Listen to Jesus as he speaks words of hope to the hopeless, and ***"speaks the truth in love"*** to those who were lost in Satan's lies.

Shouldn't that be the flavor of our speech too? And won't that stand out to the crowds? In a world of cancel culture where it's one strike and you're out; a world that calls for tolerance, but only tolerates what fits its agenda; a world that attacks and verbally abuses anything that's different; a world filled with videos of "Karens" (sorry to all those named Karen) attacking and berating others who didn't do everything exactly like they wanted—won't speech flavored with love, and forgiveness, and compassion, and positivity, and hope, and absolute

truth draw people to you in a way that another political rant, or another depressing status fishing for pity on Facebook will do the opposite?

How much more Christ-like our conversations will be if we seek to follow the encouragement that Paul gives in Ephesians, ***“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.”*** Instead of the driving thought behind our speech being, “How can I drive my opinion home?” or “How can I make them look foolish?” or “How can I show how smart and witty I am?” what if the driving thought behind our speech was, “How can I build this person up? How can I benefit them? How can I meet their needs?” Wouldn’t that give people a glimpse of God’s grace? Wouldn’t that draw them closer to you, so that you can then use your words to reveal to them God’s grace in all its fullness?

But it’s easier to say it than to actually do it, isn’t it? It’s hard to keep your conversations full of grace when people are attacking you. It’s hard to speak with salty language in the godly sense when everyone around you speaks with salty language in the ungodly sense. Tying in to last Sunday’s focus, that’s why it’s so necessary for us to continue hearing from Jesus!

If we want our speech to be filled with grace, then hear Jesus proclaim his grace to you! If we want our speech to be filled with hope and joy, then hear Jesus proclaim that he is the reason we can have constant hope and unwavering joy! If you want to be able to speak words of forgiveness, even to people who don’t deserve it, hear again how Jesus has forgiven you, even though you didn’t deserve it in the least! If you’re feeling guilty for all the times that your speech has driven people away, or given a poor impression of Christians, hear Jesus’ tell you, ***“As far as east is from west, so far has he removed our guilt from us.”***

When our hearts are filled and saturated with the Gospel, then the Gospel will flow out of our lips too. Full of grace and seasoned with salt, instead of someone asking, “You kiss your mother with that mouth?” people can say about us, “They glorify Jesus with their

mouth!” As we Join Jesus on His Mission, flavor your speech with God’s grace. Your mama will be pleased. But more importantly, God’s kingdom will grow!