

A Sermon By  
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Corona United Methodist Church  
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The 19:14 Rule  
Psalm 34:1-14

Both of our Psalm readings this morning were affirmations of the good God does for those who call on Him. Psalm 5 was a personal testimony while Psalm 34 seemed more impersonal. If you noticed that you get ten points because Psalm 34 is a teaching Psalm intended to lead us through a series of affirmations. The beliefs are laid out according to the Hebrew alphabet: verse 1 begins with a word whose first letter is Hebrew equivalent of A, verse 2 begins with a word whose first letter is the Hebrew equivalent of B, etc.

Keeping up the pattern the writer changes his style a bit when he gets to verse 11. There he uses a phrase we are becoming familiar with:

Come, O children, listen to me....

It is the invitation from the teacher to the young man or woman: come and listen to the wisdom I have to impart to you:

Come, O children, listen to me.

Which of you desires life

And covets many days to enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil,

And your lips from speaking deceit.

Depart from evil and do good;

Seek peace, and pursue it. (Psalm 34:11-14)

Good advice.

But we might well ask, "How do I do that? Especially, How do I keep my tongue from evil/and my lips from speaking deceit"? How do I do that?

I suspect that most of us have learned good answers to that question over the years. But we forget some of the things we've learned and it wouldn't hurt of be reminded of some of it occasionally.

How does one keep their tongue from evil?

A variety of ways.

One answer is KISS: "Keep it simple...." Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, ...let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no," be "no;" anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:37)

We were having a Q&A time at Annual Conference a week ago. One of the leaders of the committee that was recommending we met in Pasadena instead of Redlands next year was answering a lot of the questions from the floor and I was impressed by her long serious sounding answers that said absolutely nothing.

We are considering that proposal as part of our contingency plans for the Possible execution of this proposal....

Keep it simple.

Try your best to understand what the other person is saying because often what someone said and what we heard *are not* the same thing. I was walking one morning at Annual Conference and came across a garden with a gate and rot-iron sign over the entrance. “Redlands Community Garden” it said. I looked more carefully. It was a carefully cultivated garden for the community. It was not a place where people from the community could come and garden. The designers use of the phrase “community garden” was not what some of us are proposing.

In talking about a problem, focus on the issues rather than the people involved. That is a good way to keep working together.

I think this has healthy ramifications for a lot of us who tend to worry a lot. Focus just on the problem before us and not on that long list of “could be-s/could happen-s”. Some of us waste a lot of time constructing possible scenarios that could happen only get to the point where something should have happened and find nothing happened. We just spent a lot of time worrying over nothing.

This reminds me of some training I had a year or so ago in being a supervisor. The trainers said deal with what has been done and not in why you think they did it. The idea is that we can not know the motives for what people do, but we can record and talk with them about what they did. I think that is good advice in a lot of situations.

Be careful of exaggerations.

This is the worst ever...

This is the end...

This is going to tear us apart...

This is a catastrophe...

This is really BIG...

A constant use of exaggeration can eventually lead to others around us discounting what we are saying. Mrs. Pollifax was called to the CIA office where she gets her assignments. Any Mrs. Pollifax readers out there? She is a little ol’ lady who can pass for a tourist while she is on assignment to rescue an important government official or scope out the situation in a foreign country. Her boss had just told her that he wants her to go to the People’s Republic of China on *an extremely dangerous assignment*.

“Extremely dangerous” Bishop heard himself say firmly.

Her [Mrs. Pollifax’s] eyes widened. “But you say that about all the assignments,” she told him...

Dorothy Gilman, *Mrs. Pollifax on the China Station*, p. 3

If everything is a catastrophe, then nothing is a catastrophe. Try to be accurate.

I am reading a really interesting book on those who wrote the history of Medieval England during the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>c. (*Chronicles* Chris Given-Wilson, pp. 143-147) The writer points out that medieval historians had to make a choice of either writing in prose or poetry. Poetry was more romantic for setting all those stories of the brave knights, but prose was more accurate—you did not have to look for a rhyme or use poetic metaphor. You could just tell it the way it is. Sometimes we need to hear information clearly.

Think before you speak. O I sound like my mother! It is still good advice. A variation of it is think before you mail the letter or push the send button on the email. I think all of us have heard the advice that when we are upset, write it out. Just write out how you feel/what you’d like to say or do—write it out. Then leave it there on the desk

or on the desk top. Walk away for an hour or so, then come back. Does it say what you want to say? Could I say it better? Was simply writing it out helpful? Some times we read it over, change some words, eliminate a paragraph or two and send it on its way.

Writing it out and then leaving it for awhile is good advice because it lends itself to rule 19:14. What is rule 19:14? It comes from Psalm 19, verse 14. It is a prayer,

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart  
Be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Write out how you feel, what you “should have said” or whatever; and then leave it. Come back a little while later and read it and ask, “Is what I am saying here acceptable to the LORD?” If not, what do I need to do? Change it? Leave it? Seek some other way of acting. What does rule 19:14 say to what I am saying?

Then I think you and I will

...keep our tongues from evil  
And our lips from speaking lies.

I am speaking to myself as well as others in this sermon this morning, so let us take a few moments to reflect on what we’ve heard and seen here this morning. Amen.