

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 August 28, 2016

Exodus 20:16
 Luke 22:54-62
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, some other boys and I were out playing by the old railroad bridge, not far from the dump. We were maybe ten years old. We spotted **old Albert** coming toward us on his bike. He was an adult, but couldn't read or talk very well. And he didn't have any friends. Lots of people made fun of him.

One of the boys said, "**Hey, you know that old Albert is always asking for beer. Let's pee in one of these beer cans and see if we can get him to drink it!**" Everybody laughed and said, "**Yeah, let's do that!**" I didn't say anything. One of them picked up an empty beer can and started to pee in it as Albert got closer to us.

I didn't argue with them. I didn't say, "**No, that's not nice. We shouldn't do that.**" I just rode my bike away with a sick feeling in my stomach.

Today kids, we are thinking about the eighth commandment which says, "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**" I used to think that that just meant we **shouldn't lie** about other people. Now I know that it means:

1. Not only don't lie about others, but **don't say anything bad at all**. When I was a kid, I was taught, "**If you can't say anything good about somebody, don't say anything at all.**"
2. And, according to Martin Luther, this commandment also wants us to **try to say good things** about other people, to **help and defend** them.

Well kids, were those boys **doing a good thing** by peeing in that can and trying to get **old Albert** to drink it? No.

And kids, do you think I tried to **help or defend old Albert**? No.

I guess **I broke the eighth commandment**. **Do you say bad things** about other people or **do hurtful things** to some people? I hope not. Do you **try to help and stick up** for people who are being picked on? I hope so. God help us to help each other. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

My wife, Jennifer and I would be sitting around the table at my parents' house. Mom would be busy putting on a "**little lunch**," (everything in the breadbox, cupboards and refrigerator.) And Dad would be catching us up with what was going on around my home town. "You're not going to believe that your **cousin, Ruth**, is pregnant again! And your **old teacher, Mr. Jones** attempted suicide. And **Whitey Smith** was so drunk he fell off the bleachers at the basketball game. . ." Dad went on and on, and I loved it. No, I hated it. **Gossip**.

How often do you hear?

"Oh, I see here in the paper that **John Anderson** got convicted for DUI. I never guessed that John might have a drinking problem. This must be mortifying for him and his family. And it says he gets a \$1000 fine. They can't afford that. This is so sad. I'm going to give him a call and see if I can help out in any way."

Or how often do you hear?

"Oh, I see here in the paper that **John Anderson** got convicted for DUI. It's about time! He's always out boozing. He's no good. His whole family has always been nothing but trouble. And they're fining him \$1,000. That's not much. They should throw the book at him!"

Gossip. And it **doesn't even have to be a lie**. **If you speak hurtful things** about a person, true or not, **gossip**.

Our commandment for today is number eight. "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**." Luther says we are to work at keeping the commandments out of **fear and love** for God. Awesome God gives us life and everything we need. We wouldn't even be here if it weren't for God creating us. Awesome God. And, this same **all powerful God** is also our **all-loving God** who, **when we decided we didn't need God**, was even **willing to die** in order to show us how much we are loved. **And how much we need God**. I owe it to God, to my neighbor and to myself to try and keep the commandments. I love God and want to show that love by doing what is right in the eyes of God. **How about you?**

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." When Luther explains the meaning of the commandments, he always starts out with

what we shouldn't do. **Don't do** this: "**tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations.**" Instead, Luther says, **do this**: "**come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.**" **Dear friends, how are we doing?** This is my favorite commandment. I break it far too often. I was just telling **Ed Anderson** the other day, sometimes when I look at the guy sitting in the car beside me at the stop light, I think, "**Wow, that's a tough looking character. He looks pretty angry. I wonder what his story is.**" And then it occurs to me, "**I wonder if he is thinking the same thing about me?**"

Sue Benson gave me this translation that she made from the Norwegian. It is about how ancient **Socrates** viewed bad talk about other people.

"In ancient Greece, Socrates was known to put knowledge high. One day an acquaintance stopped the great philosopher and said, 'You know what I just heard about your friend?'

'Whoa,' said Socrates. 'Before you tell me anything, I want you to allow it to pass through a little test. It's called the Triple Filter Test.'

'Triple filter?'

'That's right,' Socrates continued. 'Before telling me anything about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you're going to say. That's why I call it the triple filter test. **The first filter is Truth.** Have you made sure that what you'll tell me is true?'

'No,' the man said, 'actually I just heard about it.'

'All right,' said Socrates. 'So you do not really know whether it is true or not. Now let's try **the second filter, the filter of Goodness.** Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?'

'No, on the contrary...'

'So,' Socrates continued, 'you want to tell me something bad about him, and you're not sure it's true. You may still pass the test, because **there's one filter left: the filter of usefulness.** Is what you want to tell me about my friend no use to me?'

'No, not really...???'

'Well,' concluded Socrates, '**if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good or even useful, why tell me at all?**'

Maybe Socrates' test might be helpful for our own day as well. Is it **true?** Is it **good?** Will telling it **help anyone?**

Luther says, “**Don’t speak the negative. Do speak the positive.**” With all the negative words being spoken in our world today, we could use a whole lot more **positive, hopeful, helpful, life-giving words**. When the religious and political authorities of Jesus’ day ganged up to arrest and kill him, **Peter failed miserably** to speak the **true, good and helpful word**. Jesus was being held in the dark of night when there weren’t many caring people around to speak on his behalf. Peter was scared silly by the danger of his own possible death. So when he was accused of being a friend of Jesus, he **denied it three times**. Even a slave girl, the lowest person of that day, got Peter to deny knowing Jesus. **When you and I are gossiping** about someone, we are also in the **denying Jesus mode**. Only it isn’t likely in order to save our lives, it is more likely to give ourselves **some sort of a feeling of superiority** over the **person we are dragging down with our words**.

Peter’s denial, lies, failure to speak the good word, left Jesus to die alone on the cross. But then Jesus **rose** from the dead, **came back, found Peter, forgave** him and **gave him a fresh start**. In the Gospel of John, Jesus literally **asks Peter three times if Peter loves him**. Peter is able, three times, to say that he loves Jesus. Jesus responds, three times, “**feed my sheep**.” I think that means, **speak the positive, hopeful, helpful, life-giving word from God**. That word is “**I love you**” – spoken first to you and me, then spoken by you and me for every other person in our lives and world.

Luther called the Church a “**mouth house**.” By this Luther meant that our **total mission** as the people of God here at First Lutheran is to **speak the good news of our God who loves the whole world** - broken, gossiping, envious, jealous, hateful – to the cross, the grave and back again. That’s what we need **Sunday school teachers, confirmation mentors, small group leaders, Bible study leaders and participants** for. And we never have enough. Right now, three weeks before the start of our Sunday school/confirmation year, we still need Sunday school team teachers, confirmation small group leaders and mentors. **Can First Lutheran be a place where God’s life-giving word makes** this a:

- **Welcoming** vs. a **shunning place**.
- **Hopeful** vs. a **judging** place.
- **Helpful** vs. a **criticizing** place.
- **Constructive** vs. a **destructive** place.
- **Up building** vs. a **denigrating** place.

In the May 31, 2016 issue of the Brainerd Dispatch, there was an article entitled, "**Mother and daughter spread joy in Stillwater.**" The first line reads, "**Alaya and Annie Kish's messages of hope and inspiration in downtown Stillwater were just what Robyn Prudhomme needed to see.**" Long story short, **Alaya**, the mom, suffered from an eating disorder, which could, for some, be the **subject of gossip**. She received treatment and is now doing much better. She said, "**Earlier this year, I had been feeling that I didn't matter, but I learned in treatment that I really do matter. And there are so many people out there who don't believe . . . they make a difference, and I know that's not true.**" In her recovery, she and her five year old daughter decided to **make a difference of their own**. They started chalking **hopeful phrases** on steps around town. "**Be brave. You matter. Keep going. Be nice to others...**" **Robyn Prudhomme**, whose husband was killed in a bike accident in October, saw the messages and they **gave her hope**. **Grief** is something people **gossip** about too. The woman with the eating disorder, the woman whose husband was killed – **both needed to be lifted**. **Gossip won't do that, but positive words of hope or encouragement will.** Don't let the **negative flow from your mouth**. **Speak the positive, life-giving word.**

Rick Severson gave me a poem entitled, "**The Donkey,**" by **G.K. Chesterton**. It reads like this:

When fishes flew and forests walked
 And figs grew upon thorn,
 Some moment when the moon was blood
 Then surely I was born.
 With monstrous head and sickening cry
 And ears like errant wings,
 The devil's walking parody
 On all four-footed things.
 The tattered outlaw of the earth,
 Of ancient crooked will;
 Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
 I keep my secret still.
 Fools! For I also had my hour;
 One far fierce hour and sweet:
 There was a shout about my ears,
 And palms before my feet.

Dear friends, if God could use a **derided donkey** to **carry the Palm Sunday king**, if God could use **denying Peter to start the Christian church** two thousand years ago, **then maybe God can use you or me to speak a life-giving word today**, here, in Aitkin, as a Sunday school teacher, as a confirmation leader, as an usher, as a fellow pew sitter, as a neighbor, as a coworker, even as a stranger... **A life-giving word.** **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

I don't want to tear down lives. I want to join Jesus in giving life. Lord help me to **“come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”** And Lord, please keep doing the same for me. Thanks be to God. Amen.