

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) – August 18, 2024

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

–Ephesians 5:6–

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Many of us have heard this little rhyme before, and it couldn't be further from the truth. Words matter in our daily lives. What we say to one another matters. It's been said that if we receive 99 compliments during the day and 1 insult, we remember the one negative insult over and above the 99 positive compliments.

During the time of Paul's ministry, how a Christian presented him or herself mattered. Paul warned them to watch their behavior and their language, not to fall into the practice of making crude jokes or impure comments which have no place in Christian community. Why? What harm could crude humor really have? The fear was that this kind of behavior could lead one into darkness. In other words, it could lead a Christian away from the light of Christ.

The Ephesians struggled, living in a world that rebels against God and his teachings. We, too, face the same struggles. Like the Ephesians, we are faced with temptations each and every day to stray from God's law. But we also know that we can rely on Christ's Word and the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us through a world that would prefer to do things its own way.

May we use our words to encourage one another, build one another up, and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others rather than using our words to harm others, to bring them down, to spread rumors.

God's eighth commandment states, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Martin Luther explains, “We should fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, lie, or gossip about our neighbors, but defend them, speak well of them, and put the most charitable construction on all that they do.”

Prayer: Forgiving Father, help us to use our words to bring life to others. Forgive us when we harm others with our words, and give us strength to stand against those who deceive. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.