THE POWER OF THE TONGUE
Proverbs 13.3

We are continuing a series on the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. Contrary to modern understandings, wisdom has a divine origin, not a human one. As we read wisdom literature, we can easily get the mistaken impression that wisdom involves the memorization and application of certain texts. The fact is, wisdom is not just common sense based upon experience; it is a result of a relationship with God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.  Proverbs 9.10

The divine origin of wisdom means that at its foundation wisdom is not a lesson to be learned but a relationship to enjoy. The wisdom we see in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs did not come from simply human origin; instead it comes from the very heart of God.

A definition that I heard years ago seems to really apply. Wisdom is seeing and responding to life from God's perspective. It really is about life lived in response to a relationship. Those responses are skills that can be developed as our relationship with God deepens.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.  2 Peter 3.18

Wisdom then becomes an attitude and an action. It is a skill that you can develop. The book of Proverbs addresses many of the issues that we commonly experience everyday of our lives. One of the common challenges we face is that of “controlling” our tongues.

He who guards his mouth controls himself.
But he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.  Proverbs 13.3

There are over 120 verses in Proverbs related to different things about our speech. As you look at Proverbs (and really, the entire Bible), there are many things that are said about our speech. This morning, I would like to try to narrow them down to three guiding principles.

1. WE REALLY DO NEED TO THINK BEFORE WE SPEAK

The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent,
and their lips promote instruction.  Proverbs 16.23 (16.24)

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers,
but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.  Proverbs 15.28 (15.2, 14)

Why should I be so thoughtful about what I say?

From the fruit of their mouth a person’s stomach is filled;
with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied.  Proverbs 18.20 (18.8; 1.31; 12.14; 13.2)
a. Words have great power and they penetrate

The tongue has the power of life and death, 
and those who love it will eat its fruit.  Proverbs 18.21

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, 
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.  Proverbs 12.18 (10.21; 11.9; 12.17; 13.17)

b. Once spoken, words spread

A scoundrel plots evil, 
and his speech is like a scorching fire.  Proverbs 16.27 (28)

It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly, 
and only later to consider his vows.  Proverbs 20.25 (18.4; 15.4)

2. WE NEED TO ENDEAVOR TO ALWAYS SPEAK THE TRUTH

The Lord detests lying lips, 
but he delights in men who are truthful.  Proverbs 12.22 (16.3; 24.26)

He who winks maliciously causes grief, 
and a chattering fool comes to ruin.  Proverbs 10.10 (6.2-19; 28.23)

3. WE SHOULD ALWAYS SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, 
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.  Proverbs 12.18 (15.4; 12.25)

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.  James 1.5

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

29 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. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.  Ephesians 4.15, 25, 29-32