

May 12, 2020

Trinity Musings #14: Rev Brian Goodings (self-isolating and not talking about you in my office at Trinity United Church: Collingwood)

A wise friend observed that, for most of us, “A secret is something you share- one person at a time.” Truth is, we have a hard time not sharing really juicy news and spreading rumours. Churches and hockey change rooms and, any organized group, provide fertile ground for growing gossip. We often preface our unkind remarks by saying, “I really shouldn’t say this...” but then we go ahead and, using a stage-whisper voice, say it anyway. Afterwards, in order to assuage our guilt we often implore the newly informed person, “Please don’t tell anyone else I said this...” You can bet your bottom dollar they are going to share it. You did.

Once upon a time, if we were confronted as being a gossipmonger, we could just usually soft peddle enough half-truths (lies) to the accuser, to avoid being punched in the nose. Not so much anymore in this age of computers and electronic gadgetry. If you say or write something online, it can go viral and might well be spread a lot further than you ever intended. Hacking and eavesdropping is a sport for troublemakers who delight in making trouble and destroying lives. Big Brother really is listening and some other not-so-nice-people too.

This Musing was sparked by a conversation I had on the weekend with my friend Dale Elyea (aka Dewey). As far as I know it wasn’t recorded. We were talking about the recent scandal caused when the private conversation between Brendan Leipsic and Jake Rodewald became public. Both are (or were) professional hockey players. Among other things, they were making fun of the appearance of a few women who are partners of other players. What they said was vicious, misogynist and deeply hurtful. They should both be appropriately punished but we should all share at least some of their shame.

None of us would want our private conversations made public either because, all of us have said hurtful things about other people at one time or another. The Donald (aka Red Rooster) seems to be unaffected and even thrives by saying vile things but is that who we want to emulate?

A few years ago a person in the United Church of Canada made a Motion at our national convention, that gossip be outlawed and forbidden in all churches. The Motion, was at first, met with a national guffaw. How on earth, especially in a church congregation, would that ever be possible?

The Motion was defeated and generally dismissed as pie in the sky thinking...but the spirit and intention of his Motion has stayed with me. Loose lips really do sink ships and gossip (by definition unkind) can destroy families and divide communities of all kinds.

The early humans had the same problem with gossiping that we do and there are at least twenty passages in the Bible warning about the harm that saying unkind things about others can bring. The intention of much of the Bible is not specifically about

being religious, but rather to encourage people to adopt ways that will allow them to live peacefully together. “On earth as in heaven” stuff.

The tongue is said to be like the rudder of a great ship. It is comparatively small in size to the whole, but it can steer the entire community into danger and ruination. People’s lives end up wrecked on the rocks if gossip is at the helm. (James 3)

During this time Covid-19 we are doing a lot of Zooming and Twittering (Bryan Adams might now regret sharing his frustration) and putting our thoughts on electronic devices. We need to be very careful about what we think and post.

Better to avoid saying unkind things about people altogether. Takes practice but, all of us, I believe can try and do better. It behoves all of us to take note of how much harm has been done to their lives and the lives of others by the brutal and ignorant conversation of two very immature men/boys.

Words you think are being shared in private online may well become public. Could cost you a career in the NHL and be really hurtful and harmful to some very innocent people.

Maybe I should send them this Musing so they know I’ve been talking about them?

James 3:1-12

Taming the Tongue

