

Influences for good or ill



Different routes to the bed and breakfast at Widecombe in the Moor on Dartmoor give a nice end to a day of exploring. We had taken a day out at Torbay, going down Kent's Caverns, a boat trip from Torquay to Brixton and an afternoon walking on Berry Head overlooking the sweep of the bay far below us. The finale of the day was to cross the River Dart to Dartmouth on a vehicle ferry. The map showed the river narrowing as it flowed out to sea. We discovered that the river narrowed as it passed between high cliffs on either side. As the sun sank behind the cliffs on the southern bank of the river the windows of houses built close together in rows up the steep cliff side reflected the sun with such brilliance that it seemed as the houses were on fire. The houses on the opposite side of the river were disappointingly trapped in the shade of the cliffs. No doubt the scene would be reversed with the rising sun in the morning.

Dartmouth lost its appeal as it nestled under the cliffs – it appeared dull and uninviting. I thought of how it is rather like our contrasting moods. We are so much more attractive when we feel on top or when we handle well the situation we are facing. However, it can be easier sometimes to succumb to a duller mood within when we do not feel so good about ourselves for whatever reason. We may try to hide away making ourselves as inconspicuous as possible. Ultimately the more we hide in the shadows the more unattractive and uninteresting we become.

My heart sank as we reached the bottom of the narrow, cobbled road which led to the quay and I saw the ferry. It resembled a pontoon. At first I thought it might be a chain ferry similar to the one we used to cross the Broads at Reedham Ferry when we have a day out in Norfolk. However, the other side seemed rather far away for that and there was no wheel house or heavy chain to be seen. Moored next to the ferry was a medium sized motor boat. Much to my surprise and consternation I found out when a seaman climbed into it and started the motor that this boat was attached to the ferry and would be transporting us across to the other side. Obviously, it was safe, being tried and tested for a long time. I felt a bit silly with all my unnecessary fears.

I thought of what James had written of the power and influence of our tongues as we ferried across the water attached to such a small craft with sufficient power to keep a ferry

transporting a fair tonnage of metal on board afloat and on course.

He writes in James 3:4 – *‘Take ships as an example – Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.’*

And in 3:9 – *‘With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers this should not be.’*

With the words our tongue utters we can offer encouragement, kindness, sympathy, helpfulness, constructive correction and advise. On the other hand our tongue can, with constant criticism, sarcasm and dry humour, belittle and destroy confidence. Its anger can demoralise and crush someone's spirit. Its devious deliberations can destroy someone's character, obscure the truth and enforce wrong judgements.

3:7 – *‘All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.’*

Strong words! Contrast that with Paul's words in Philippians 4:8 as he encourages an attitude conducive to better communications when he writes:

‘Finally, brothers, Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is praiseworthy – think about such things.’

Perhaps, the challenge has more to do with our thoughts - and they stem from what is in our hearts. If we get to grips with them and are transformed by the renewing of our minds, as Paul urges us to do in Romans 12: 2, we will have a better influence for good as we communicate, whether it be with those we get on well with or with those who irritate and bring the worst out in us.

