

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: June 18, 2017
Sermon Title: Enough Already! Enough!
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14

Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10

*Let us now sing the praises of famous men,
our ancestors in their generations.
The Lord apportioned to them great glory,
his majesty from the beginning.
There were those who ruled in their kingdoms,
and made a name for themselves by their valour;
those who gave counsel because they were intelligent;
those who spoke in prophetic oracles;
those who led the people by their counsels
and by their knowledge of the people's lore;
they were wise in their words of instruction;
those who composed musical tunes,
or put verses in writing;
rich men endowed with resources,
living peacefully in their homes—
all these were honoured in their generations,
and were the pride of their times.
Some of them have left behind a name,
so that others declare their praise.
But of others there is no memory;
they have perished as though they had never existed;
they have become as though they had never been born,
they and their children after them.
But these also were godly men,
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;
. . . Their offspring will continue for ever,
and their glory will never be blotted out.
Their bodies are buried in peace,
but their name lives on generation after generation*

Let me see if I have this story right. On Wednesday, early in the morning, an old white guy, a Bernie Sanders volunteer, who hangs out at the YMCA and lives in a van, goes to a baseball field in the suburbs of Virginia and shoots at Republican congressmen who are practicing for a charity baseball game. And I can't decide if this is a story that makes absolutely no sense or it's a story that makes perfect sense for our times. I say "perfect sense" because a couple of hours later, a fired UPS worker showed up and killed his coworkers in San Francisco. And that story barely got noticed.

The next morning, I'm listening to Imus on the radio. His guest was Jeffrey Toobin, a great writer and scholar, and the two men are making the point that America has always had horrible people saying horrid things, and doing horrid things to one another. Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton, the founding fathers hurled insults. In the Civil War we killed one another; we've had lynchings, assassinations, and just plain old vulgar, ugly speech, long before there was Internet anonymity to hide behind. Even Imus and Toobin realized they sounded as though they were excusing America's worst behavior.

So pick one: we've always been rude, crude, ugly, vicious people; or, we are now ruder, cruder, uglier, more vicious than ever before. Neither one is comforting. So whichever one you pick, I say, "Enough." That's my Father's Day message.

In our church, we've been restoring old-time traditions. The last few years we've made a big deal out of Mother's Day, and a couple of years ago we started reviving Father's Day, but we are also modern enough to realize that while each gender has certain qualities associated with it, the best of those qualities could be lived out by all of us. So, for example, if we say moms are great listeners, that women are sensitive . . . well, come on, guys, it wouldn't hurt for us men to be better listeners and more sensitive. And it's true in reverse. We've let the world think that men are the masters of business, leadership, religion. We conveniently forgot about the "wonder women" of the Bible, heroes of business, heroes of government, heroes of faith.

Yes, most of the good stuff, good qualities, run both ways. So when I say my Father's Day message is "enough," I'm drawing on an old stereotype and expanding it to all of us. For those of us of a certain age, a common household phrase was, "Wait till your father gets home!" The idea was Dad will settle it. Kids fighting over the TV or which record could be played on the stereo or refusing to settle down and do homework or just one sibling annoying the heck out of the others: "Wait till your father gets home!" And when Dad finally did get home, put down his lunch bucket or briefcase, sat on his favorite chair

ready to take a snooze, and all of a sudden, family life is out of control, squabbles run amok, the noise level is too high, and at some point Dad's voice bellows, "Enough already! Enough!"

Nowadays we'd call that an intervention. The threat "Wait till your father gets home!" is the pending threat of intervention. Whatever's gone wrong, he's going to get in the middle of it and fix it. Or Dad's bellowing out, "Enough!" That's an active intervention. Whatever has been going on isn't going to be tolerated anymore.

So I'm suggesting on this Father's Day, "Enough!" Our society needs an intervention. Somebody needs to look at the garbage all around us, the mean talk, the cyber-bullying, the social media posts, the mean-spiritedness, the texting, sexting, tweeting, retweeting, what we type out on the keyboard and send out over the Internet. The posts, the trolls, what's on TV and over the radio. What passes nowadays for conversation, humor, or opinion. "Enough, already, Enough!"

Ted Nugent, that aging rock 'n' roll legend and vitriolic hater of Obama and Clinton, even Ted Nugent announced this week, "I'm not going to engage in hateful rhetoric anymore. My wife has convinced me I just can't use those harsh terms . . . We've got to be civil to one another . . . we've got to be more respectful to the other side."

Here's a surprise announcement: Ted Nugent agrees with the Bible! Jesus once said, "You have heard it said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' But I tell you, anyone who is *angry* will be subject to judgment. It is said anyone who says 'raca' will be brought to court. But I tell you anyone who calls someone 'you fool,' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:21-22)

Look at that. Jesus starts with the obvious: "Don't kill anybody," then he ups the ante. The real issue, he says, is anger. The worst of us starts in anger. And anger's best weapon is the mouth. Of course, that was written before modern technology, when people actually had to be mean in person, by mouth. Now, we have lots of ways to be mean and nasty.

Notice, Jesus cites two insults. One is the word "raca." Nobody knows what it meant, but whatever it meant 2,000 years ago, it was bad. When I was a kid, we had our own "raca," the one comment that everyone agreed would not be tolerated. You could never, ever, say anything bad about someone else's mother or sister. Never . . . or you were toast.

But Jesus went beyond that. "Enough!" he declared, "Enough with the insults, enough with the putdowns." Jesus actually says, "You call somebody a fool, you are dangerously close to going to hell!"

Christians have been telling people that are going to hell for a long time. You go to the wrong church, you are going to hell. You get baptized the wrong way, you're going to hell. You have wrong beliefs, you're going to hell. You're Jewish or gay or Hindu or a Red Sox fan, you're going to hell. Jesus doesn't say any of that. He does say you keep using words to hurt people, you're going to get burned.

Of course, we really pay attention when it gets ugly on the national scene. Bill Maher, the white TV talk show host, uses the N-word to describe himself and was amazed to discover people don't think that's cool. Kathy Griffin, a comedian, holds up a pretend severed head of President Trump and discovers people don't think that's funny.

People spent eight years telling us President Obama was a Muslim born in Kenya. Megyn Kelly is interviewing a man who declared that the Newtown Sandy Hook murders never took place. And there are the folks who show up at every event, every rally, every protest, with their ugly signs, hateful words, not-so-idle threats. Jesus looks at all that and says, "That's 'raca,' those are words that shouldn't be used. They smell of hell. You're going to get burned."

This is a strange Father's Day sermon, triggered, of course, by the shootings at the Republican Congressional baseball team practice. The would-be assassin stewed in his own juices of anger for ages. He's sort of the perfect proof of Jesus's teaching that murder begins with anger, and anger comes from words that spew out unchecked, and no one will say "Enough, already. Enough!" No one will be the dad in the room. So, on Father's Day, I'm calling for some old-fashioned "fathers," gender-free, I don't care if it's a male or female, adult or youngster, a politician, a celebrity, a sports star, or just plain folks.

Years ago, I was in Nicaragua during their Civil War, the Contra War against the Sandinistas, Nicaraguans killing Nicaraguans. I met with the cardinal of Nicaragua. We asked him to intervene, use his power to stop the killing. He refused. He said, "If you have two children who are fighting, you don't do anything until you have both children in tow." I said, "Spoken like a man with no kids." A real father grabs whichever kid you can grab, gets in the middle, puts a stop to it, bellows, "Enough, already! Enough!"

When I was a young pastor, I could do some things that would probably get me arrested now, but they were quite effective . . . makes me yearn for the good old days. I remember one night we had a high school youth group meeting, and

this boy was spewing all this anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish stuff, so I took my two fingers, twisted his ear as hard as I could, pulled him up out of his chair by his ear and said, "Don't you ever talk like that again as long as you live." Years later, he told me it was the most important conversation of his life. I'm not trying to make myself the hero of my own sermon because my mouth can get me close to hell too.

About that same time, I was on vacation up in Maine when Nixon resigned in disgrace. That night I had dinner with my elderly Aunt Capitola, an old Yankee farmer in Mechanic Falls, Maine. During the whole visit, I was mocking Nixon, cheering his demise, feeling pretty cool. After about an hour of my arrogance, I finally looked at my aunt, sitting quietly, looking hurt and sad. I don't know if she was a Nixon fan, but she was a fan of America. She believed in America. She loved America, the inherent goodness of America, the decency of America. And what was going on, including my mouth, was unseemly. Art McCain quotes his Tennessee mother saying about some behaviors, "It ain't fittin'." *Ain't fittin'*. Unseemly. Not proper. Ugly. "Raca."

Now, I'm coming dangerously close to something that I actually don't believe in: censorship. But I am close enough to it that I need to clarify. *I do not believe in censorship*. In America, you're free to say anything you want, however bad, rude, mean, or ugly, even "raca." You're free to say it, tweet it, print it. But . . . you're also free to pay the price for it. That price may be a boycott or shame, or some pastor twisting your ear so hard it almost pulls it off your head. I'm volunteering to do the ear twisting. You can pick your own method to say, "Enough already! Enough!"

We don't have to be a nation of silent sheep, allowing the political bullies and the cyber-bullies and the culture-bullies and the everyday bullies to be ruling the roost. We need some folks to say, "It ain't fittin'," "Enough already, enough!"

That's what our times demand. The Scripture that was read before the sermon is really an "almost Scripture," it's not in the Bible (or most Bibles) Nobody disagrees with it, it just didn't get voted into the main Bible. Basically, it's a book of wisdom, statements about living a good life, an honorable life.

The verses we used are perfect for Father's Day, a day when we celebrate the best of fathering of uncle-ing and grandfathering, of being a good male-type person. Such men are described as "renowned for their power, giving wise counsel . . . having understanding . . . wise and eloquent in instruction . . . furnished with ability, living peaceably."

That's what our times demand. People who will use their influence, their position, to promote what is best in us, to elevate the goodness in us, to produce the wisest understanding, the most eloquent instruction in us, through us.

Our high school seniors head off to college in a few weeks. Those first few days at college you get to establish your presence. As you begin a whole new era in your life, you get to show the kind of person you are the first time you open your mouth, the first time you meet your roommate and dorm mates, the first time you go to a party or join a club or start practice for a team.

For the rest of us, it's not quite so dramatic. But the start of each day, the start of each week is a new chance to be a new voice, at work, with your friends, in the home.

So what am I really saying? Here's the truth, and we all know it. In the days ahead, each of us is going to be in some conversation where somebody says something ugly. On the commuter train, at a party, on the golf course, with friends, at work, even at home or just hanging out. Somebody will say something unseemly, "not fittin'," "raca," insulting, ugly, mean. And most of our lives, we've laughed, maybe uncomfortably, but we've laughed. Maybe we just ignored it, pretended not to hear it. Enough, already, no more. Let's stop it. Speak up. Put an end to it. Let folks know that's not you.

Years ago, everybody smoked, right? Everywhere, all the time, no problem. Today if I were to light up a cigar, immediately, *immediately*, someone would tell me, "You can't do that, not here, not while I'm around! Put it out. Stop it." Why? Because we deemed it unhealthy, not just for the smoker, but for the rest of us. We don't want to be poisoned. And yet we stand by and let people poison our air every day with lousy, hateful, hurtful words. Enough, already! No more *bystanding*. It's time to be *upstanding* and let people know that's not you.

All of us, every single one of us, let's be the "dad" in the room as a Father's Day gift to the world. Happy Father's Day.