

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: The stories, and other elements of this sermon, contain copyrighted materials. We purchase them and have permission to use them in our parish, but not outside of it. Please do not post this sermon, or the stories in it, on any social media site. That would violate our agreement and subject us to a fine

Pentecost 16 B – September 12, 2021

“Swift to hear – Slow to Speak”

Read: James 1: 17 - 27/Memorize: James 1: 19 b - 20

Four women were playing bridge together in the Recreation Room of a certain retirement community out in California. They were chatting, more than they were paying attention to their game. They noticed a gentleman wander into the room. They had never seen him before. He was obviously a newcomer to the Retirement community.

One of them said, “Well, hello there. You’re new here, aren’t you?” The man smiled and said that he was. “Just moved in this morning,” he said. A second lady spoke up, “Where did you live before?” The man, matter-of-factly said, “San Quentin. I was just released. I’d been there for thirty years.” “Oh, is that right?” said the third lady. “What were you there for?” Without hesitating, the man said, “I murdered my wife.” A fourth lady sat up in her chair at hearing that. Her eyes suddenly sparkled and she brightly smiled at him. “Oh,” she said, “that means you’re single.” Have you ever noticed, sometimes we don’t really listen.

Ever go by somebody and say “How are you doing today?” When they respond “Terrible.” You reply “That’s great.” Communication is crucial. That’s especially true when we want to talk about practical Christianity, which is exactly what James wanted to do.

Some of you may remember that Martin Luther called James a “straw epistle.” He didn’t like it; didn’t think it should be included in the Bible. He may have misunderstood James on a point or two. Admittedly; Luther is right here. There isn’t much proclamation of Jesus in the book of James. That might explain some of Luther’s hesitancy. Perhaps we want to delve into it a bit more before we make our decision.

Let’s check out a few things from James. Here’s the first word we want to hear: that “every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” When good things happen to us, we normally say thank you to those who do them. After a while, we

might just take the good things, and those who do them for granted. We can sometimes treat God in the very same way. We thank Him at first, but then take Him and His good things for granted. At times, we may even think we've earned what we receive so we don't need to thank God at all. That's a sin, but I digress.

I'm not suggesting that when someone is telling you they had a terrible day, you start bombarding them with the message that God only sends good things. You see that's the next word that we want to make sure we hear. James reminds us that "everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak."

Why was Jesus' ministry so successful? Why did He seem to understand people so much? The answer: He listened. Beyond words, Jesus also listens to our inner longings. Often times, that's all people need, a friend who listens to them.

The disciples are often in conflict with each other. Whereas, Jesus is listening to their deeper needs and the needs of the people He encountered. He listened because he loved them all, just as He loves us. Sometimes "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" is just being Christ-like in our listening.

There are times when we need to speak out. Consider this, a plumber wrote to the National Bureau of Standards: he found that hydrochloric acid opened plugged pipes quickly and asked if it was a good thing to use.

A scientist at the Bureau replied as follows: "The uncertain reactive processes of hydrochloric acid placed pipes in jeopardy when alkalinity is involved. The corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanence."

The plumber wrote back thanking the bureau for telling him it was all right. The scientist showed the letter to his boss, who immediately wrote back: "Hydrochloric acid generates a toxic, noxious residue which will produce invalidating reactions. Consequently, some alternative procedure is preferable."

The plumber wrote back and said he agreed with the Bureau, "Hydrochloric acid smells, but it works just fine." The two scientists went to their top boss. The next day the plumber received this telegram: "Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats the pipes!" Sometimes, we just need a clear, concise, easy to understand response.

People need the same type of word when we're sharing Christ. We want to deliver the Good News of Jesus in the most loving and clearest way, so it is understood. We

know that without that loving, clear message, they will be lost. That's the last thing God wants to happen. After all, Jesus coming into our world was a pretty clear message of God's love.

I'm sure you've heard it said that "actions speak louder than words." Here again, James has a word for us. Listening to God's Word may be good. Putting it into action is even better. If we fail to do that, we're missing the most powerful way we have of "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" People notice actions.

As a Christian, people are going to look for the witness of your actions. Those reveal your obedience to the command of our Lord to "love your neighbor." One of the highest joys of the Christian is to serve God. The dilemma is God's in heaven, we're down here. So we serve God, by serving people.

As we were walking out of church two weeks ago, Jean Bucher said that she's back to going to CCIA. She picks up the food that we put in the cart in the coatroom. Some have asked if we can start doing that again. The answer is, we can. We help feed over 4,000 families each year through our partnership with CCIA. Without our gifts, C.C.I.A would not be able to carry out this ministry on our behalf. They look forward to our prayers, gifts and support.

Finally, James reminds us that there are some really important things we can do. We can look after those who are most in need. In the time of James one of the neediest were widows. Without a family, she was doomed to poverty and likely, death. There were no jobs or social services she could go to.

Along with widows James says one other group is needy: orphans. Little ones who have no defense. When we help the people who are truly helpless, without any other resources, James says it is religion that is pure and faultless.

As Luther read James he might have thought James was saying that we get saved by doing good works. What James was saying is that when we believe in Jesus, we want to be like Him. He came into this world to help all of us. We are the "widows and orphans" of His love. We could not help or save ourselves. We needed the grace of God. That grace came in the person and work of Jesus.

In Jesus, God gave us exactly what we needed. When we serve God by serving others we're not trying to gain brownie points with God. We're being obedient to God's call, just as Jesus was. Jesus listened, spoke and did all that His Father sent Him to do, so

that we could live with Him in eternity. His love and grace also make a difference for our lives now. We want to share that love and grace with all. In so doing, we will find our lives filled with joy. May God's grace fill us all with His joy because that would be the best good and perfect gift that we could have.