

September 2, 2012

**The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

James 1.17-27

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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Shhh.

Hush your mouth.

Be quiet.

Stop talking, typing, texting, messaging, tweeting and Facebooking.

In our reading from the Epistle of James this morning, we hear the instruction “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

James was a keen observer of human behavior. He was also a steady teacher of and about human behavior and his epistle calls us to move through the world with deliberateness and intentionality. This is not something that we, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are used to doing.

The world we live in now is asking us, always, to go faster and faster. Our cars and computers, telephones and internet connections, our news and the opinions that come along with them, it is all at lightning speed and gaining everyday.

One of the results of this kind of speed that surrounds us is that folks are following less and less my mother's advice: If you don't have anything to say, don't say anything.

You heard that correctly: If you don't have anything to say, don't say anything.

I didn't really get what she was saying until I had motor-mouth kids of my own, but this concept is also brilliantly illustrated all around us. Because of the super-speed of communications outlets, not only do we hear the latest breaking news while it is happening, but we also hear everyone's interpretive reactions to it before the emergent event is even over.

At times I appreciate the conversation, the social stimulation, the connection, but I am getting increasingly weary, as I know many of you are, too, of the constant clamor of every armchair pundit and kitchen-table politician who feels it necessary to throw in one more scathing remark lest we forget where they stand on the issue du jour.

And the faster we communicate, the more of these opinions there are as each of us scrambles to get our voice heard amidst the din.

We're stumbling towards becoming a culture that has made a habit of talking and typing before we think. And, as we've all known since childhood, this is dangerous territory.

James would be terribly disappointed in us.

Shhhhh... James says. Hush. Listen.

In your listening, be discerning. Use your God-given ears to figure out what is useful to hear and what is just useless noise. Then, once you've figured out how to hear God's voice in the wilderness of sound out there, think about what it means for your life. Think about how to respond, how you can use that voice to organize your thoughts and your life and your actions. Think about how to protect yourself from evil then practice it. Think about how to protect others from evil and practice that, too.

And then, James tells us, once you have sorted all that out, THEN, with meekness you may speak.

This message to be quiet is not what we are accustomed to hearing from our epistles. The message from Paul is more often that we must be proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ at all times. There is much truth to that, of course. That is, after all, one way we will get this vastly important message to spread: by talking about it.

But there is truth in James' message as well. Being part of the noise—the cacophony—of unsupported opinion, flash-in-the-pan schemes, and folks searching for their limelight by any means, this will not spread the message that includes prayer and gentleness, putting others first, a message of serving rather than self-serving.

James is asking us to close our mouths and open our ears. When we do, we will hear more clearly the Word in the wilderness of this world of speed with no consequence.

Where James and Paul meet comes toward the end of today's passage. As James is reminding us to hold our tongues, he reminds us that the core of the Gospel is caring for one another, especially for those who are least, lost and lonely. "Widows and orphans" is a symbol for the greater whole. The widows and orphans are the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the sick, the forgotten, the helpless, the victimized, the naked, the disenfranchised, the lonely. They are all around us and with us. They are us. And we are called, by Jesus Christ, to serve one another.

James and Paul agree that service does not earn us grace or love or gifts from God, we already have that. Service to others brings meaning into our lives and

meaning into a society that sometimes seems filled only with hot air. When we live in this way, mouths closed, hearts and hands open, we change the world act by act, life by life.

Shhh... Hush your mouth. Listen. Discern. Serve.