

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Don't Get Put in a Trash Can

James 1:19-27

Sunday, November 19, 2023

*Rev. Philip Galyon, Pastor of Youth and College Ministry*

---

Before we begin this morning, Pastor Max wanted me to tell you that he wishes he could be here with us in worship this morning, but he is currently in Athens wrapping up his conference duties from the specially called annual conference yesterday.

Now, growing up, I was a United Methodist pastor's kid, which meant I had to move around every so often. When I was 9, my dad served a church in small rural Virginia. The church's parking lot had a basketball goal attached to one of the light posts in the parking. My house was conveniently next door to the church and so that meant I got to go play basketball pretty much whenever I wanted. One particular memory I have of this makeshift basketball goal is playing with some older kids in the community one day. I was a highly competitive child who played sports, but on this particular day, the teenagers I was playing basketball with, remember I was 9, got the best of me. They ran past me for layups, played tough defense against me, and blocked every shot I tried to put up. On the last blocked shot, my 9 year-old self decided I had had enough and proceeded to spit on the 6'5, 220lb kid that blocked my shot and said you stink.....except I said words that are usually frowned upon in most social gatherings. My words got me in trouble, not with my parents, but with the kid I spit on. I didn't get punched in the face, I didn't get kicked off the basketball court, instead, I got picked up and placed in the church dumpster which was conveniently located next to the basketball goal. I think it is also worth mentioning that my parents saw all of this happen from the kitchen window, which faced the church parking lot and didn't have to give out any punishment because I learned that day (and honestly, I should have learned it earlier), that my words mean something and that I should have taken a second to think before I spoke. Simple yet very hard to do.

### **James 1:19-27**

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your

anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

As we explore how that applies to our passage this morning, I want your takeaway from the next few minutes to be twofold: a) Our words are far more sacred than we give them credit for. b) We need to move beyond the hearing of God's word, and put what we hear into action.

Words matter and according to our passage this morning, we cannot bring about God's righteousness through revengeful or evil words, which only bring destruction. You see, James was writing to the early church in hopes of encouraging them to live like Christ and giving them practical ways in which to live out their faith. James is asking his readers to take their actions, words, and every day life from a place of ordinary, to a place of sacred living; living in a way that amplifies the imago dei, the image of God that is in all of us. And that's the hardest part of being a Christian sometimes, isn't it? Acting toward and speaking to others in a way that is Christ-like. Too often in our world, we do the exact opposite of what James tells us to do. We want to be quick to anger, quick to speak, and slow to listen. But that's not what our passage says, is it? Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to get angry.

True listening is something we all struggle with, because true listening requires us to be present and sit with people in their pain and making them feel truly appreciated, listened to, and loved. True listening is sacred. It goes beyond a traditional, ordinary head nod and sympathy. It requires empathy, which is hard because sometimes our perspectives blind us from the pain that other people experience.

Being slow to speak might be the hardest one out of these 3 for me to accomplish because I love to talk. I love to try and fix situations. And sometimes the best solution is for me to be quiet and listen. I had a student at a former church come to me with the pain of his grandfather dying and, in my head, as he was talking, I wasn't practicing true listening. I was coming up with a 4-step plan to fix his problem and when he was done talking, I was going to swoop in and save the day. The very millisecond he was done talking, I was quick to talk and about half way through he called me out on my mistake. You didn't even hear a word I said, did you? In that moment, He needed someone to sit with him and show empathy, not put a temporary Band-aid on his problems. He needed me to be quick to listen and slow to speak. I did neither of those.

And last but not least, Slow to anger...that's hard isn't it? I think it's important to understand that the word James uses for anger comes from the Greek word *orge* meaning anger that is produced out of wrath or impulse. In other words, the anger in this passage is talking about anger that is not healthy and problematic, it's impulsive and defiles our Christian witness when that kind of anger makes an appearance. What's interesting about anger in general terms is that we can't help what makes us angry. It's is a human emotion that we are born with. However, it is what we do in and with our anger that make our words and actions destructive. I believe there's a healthier way to deal with our anger. We can view our anger as an emotion that bubbles up inside us when people are mistreated or not loved the way they should be or when we see oppression and injustice happening in our world. And when we feel that emotion come up in us, the question we need to ask is what can I do about it? How can I help? How can I turn this anger I have and do something useful for God's glory? You see it's how we handle our anger, even in the midst of wrongdoing and oppression that gets us in trouble

sometimes. James calls us to be quick to listen, slow to speak so that we get slow to anger. And when we are slow to anger, we have the opportunity to respond like Jesus to the injustices in our world instead of a reaction that would bring more harm than healing. We have the opportunity to create a plan on how to channel this holy anger and bring attention to those in our world who are being harmed and facing oppression. James talks about being meek in our passage this morning. Being meek doesn't mean we shy away from the call of the gospel, being meek means that we don't allow our anger to consume us in unhealthy and ungodly ways.

Author Rob Bell says, "May you become aware of your anger. May you learn to channel it, to focus it, direct it into something beautiful. And may it fuel sacred acts of healing and restoration." This ties directly into the second half of our passage. This is where our words and actions intersect, where our ordinary words and actions become sacred. This quote hits the heart of "the law of liberty" verse that James talks about because the law of liberty that he refers to is the law that Jesus brings us; a law of love, hope, restoration, justice, and peace.

When we hear the word, we must do the word. Our actions add value to our sacred words and give them life. We as Christians can no longer be passive observers in God's world. We are called to be active participants. That means we must take what we learn in here and go into the world to follow the call of Jesus. God's world and God's creations are sacred and need to be treated as such. If we view everything in our lives as ordinary, we are prone to stay still and not respond to what is happening in our world. But when we view our world through the lens of Jesus and see our world as sacred, it is that sacredness that moves us beyond being passive Christians and makes us doers of the word and not just hearers.

Toward the end of this passage, James tells his readers to tame their tongues. Taming our tongue is a sacred act. It shows self-control and taming (or bridle as James calls it) our tongue bears the fruit of the spirit. And...there's a distinction I would like to make about holding our tongue. Too often we tame our tongue regarding the wrong things. We refuse to tame our tongue when it comes to furthering our own ideological agenda that isn't rooted in the gospel and when that happens, we deceive our hearts. We struggle to tame our tongue when it comes to our interactions on Social media, especially when those interactions are with people we disagree with. That's what James means

when he speaks of taming the tongue. Instead, we take that verse to mean that we hold our tongues at injustices that occur in our world, when Jesus very clearly tells us to do the opposite. He calls us to stand up and use our sacred words for the oppressed, the marginalized, the outcast.

Taming the tongue means we quit speaking to people in ways that are not sacred and start using our sacred words. James gives us two defined groups of people to stand up for, to use our voice for: the orphans and the widows, and that's just scratching the surface of those who are marginalized and oppressed in our world. We should never tame our tongue when it comes to advocating for them and others in our world that are being oppressed.

We look back at the gospels and find that Jesus ran to the sick, the hurting, and the broken with open arms every single time and we should do the same. We need to do and go when we hear of a need in our community. We are to find the relationship between our ordinary words and actions, and find the sacred in them because when we realize there is sacred in the ordinary, our mindset shifts from going through the motions to living a life of active faith and treating people the way the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to.

Theologian Deitrich Bonehoffer says, "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." Too often we look at the brokenness in our world and think our thoughts and prayers are all we need to do to magically make the pain go away. Our passage today begs to differ because in the midst of what are seemingly ordinary people and places experiencing brokenness, are sacred people and sacred places made in the imago dei that deserve to be met with our sacred words, and acts of kindness, service and love; people that deserve for us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry.

Too often, the world will try and label who is sacred and who is ordinary and undeserving, but through our seemingly ordinary words and actions, the sacred heart of Jesus and the Gospel takes our words and actions, using them to bring love, light, and hope to a world that is hurting and the reality is we have hurting people in our pews, in our seats today, whether they vocalize their hurt or not.

Yesterday in Athens, Georgia, there was a specially called Annual Conference for the purpose of ratifying the disaffiliation agreements of churches in our

conference that want to leave the United Methodist Church. This is going to leave some in our area without a church home. We've already had several visitors and new members join us at JCUMC from disaffiliating churches. We as a church have a unique opportunity over the coming weeks and months as we may see new people walk through our doors to offer radical hospitality to not just those we have in our pews already, but those who are not here yet. We have a chance to put our best foot forward. We have the chance to move beyond just hear of the word, but to actually live out our calling as Christians and sit with those who are hurting, grieving, and trying to find their way, no matter what season of life they are in.

Our passage reminds us this morning that as Christians, nothing we do is ordinary any longer, but sacred. Everyone we meet is sacred, not ordinary. As you sit down at the thanksgiving table this week with your relatives you may disagree with, I want you to remember what we read this morning: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to get angry so you don't get put in a trash can like 9 year-old me. We are called to be doers, not just hearers, and always look for the sacred in the ordinary because God sees the sacred in us.

**In the name of the triune God we pray, Amen.**



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097  
770-497-8215 [www.johnscreekumc.org](http://www.johnscreekumc.org)