

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

August 29, 2021, The 14th Sunday After Pentecost/The 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, James 1:17-27

“Be Quick to Listen!”

I'm wondering how many of you have been on a longer car ride and have heard yourself saying to the children or teens in the car, "let's play the 'Quiet Game,' and see who can be quiet the longest?" How many of you have said this? (show of hands) And how many of you who are children now, or when you were children, have had this said to you?

When I was a child, I knew that the Quiet Game was not a game at all.

This morning's reading from James introduces us to a different version of the Quiet Game. If you have ever been in a Bible Study on the book of James, or if you've ever heard a sermon preached on the book of James, then you have probably run into the phrase that James is best known for: "but be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." That is the phrase that I think of if someone says something about this little book of James.

So, at Tuesday's Presbytery meeting when they told us we would be focusing on this morning's passage from James throughout the meeting, I immediately thought of "be doers of the word, and not merely hearers."

The leadership team of the Presbytery used a spiritual practice called Lectio Divina at the meeting. We have used Lectio Divina here in Sunday worship, in adult Sunday School classes and I've used it with the Confirmation Classes. Lectio Divina is a Latin phrase meaning "divine reading."

In Lectio Divina the same passage is read 3-4 times and you are invited to listen with your heart for a word or phrase that speaks to you as you listen.

Then you are invited to share that word or phrase with the people with whom you are doing Lectio Divina. Each time you hear the passage read, there is another question to guide your listening.

Since there were over 70 of us in the Presbytery Zoom meeting, they put us into small groups in break out rooms. I got to meet with two elders from two different churches in the Springfield area. As I told them, I was surprised by the phrase that caught my attention because I feel like I've never noticed it before in James.

The verse that caught and held my attention was: "be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." I think this might be James's version of the Quiet Game.

I don't know about you, but I think this phrase could change our lives in this covid-flavored world we are living in, if everyone decided to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." But there is that phrase that may even be older than the Quiet Game, that when we point our finger at someone else, we are pointing three fingers back at ourselves.

So, while I think it would be great if all "those" people were "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger," I'm thinking that James's words are for me as much as they are for everyone else! Because it's really easy to be quick to speak, isn't it? It's another thing altogether to be quick to listen and slow to speak!

There's something about that call to be "quick to listen and slow to speak" that has really caught my attention. So, at the Presbytery meeting, while I was in my small group wondering what it

looks like when someone is quick to listen and slow to speak, one of the Elders I was meeting with told a story.

She said she had always lived in the Springfield area and has many friends there. Just before the Covid shut downs in March of 2020, two of the women in her circle of friends experienced the deaths of their husbands.

And this woman and her friends became concerned for these two women who were now separated from their family and friends because of Covid shut downs.

So, this circle of friends decided that every single day they would gather by Zoom together to support these two women who were so recently widowed and now totally alone. From March of 2020 forward they have not stopped checking in with these women by Zoom every single day. Every single day they are being quick to listen and slow to speak with their friends who are on this grief journey since the deaths of their husbands.

Can you imagine what the last 18 months have been like, to be given the gift of friends who are quick to listen and slow to speak? I was so touched by this story of friendship and the gift, day by day, of listening.

As I thought about other pictures of those who are quick to listen and slow to speak, I was reminded of a clergy friend. When there was the tragic death of a high schooler in her community, she went up to the high school as soon as she heard the news. She spent that first day at the school while the students, teachers and staff were dealing with the devastating news of this death. And during the day she followed the class schedule of the that deceased teenager, sitting in on each of her classes in case someone needed her to listen, or to hug, or to care.

She didn't preach, she didn't hand out scripture verses, she hugged and held and listened.

She was quick to listen and slow to speak,
and she was the face and arms of Christ in those classrooms that first heartbreaking day.

Then this week I received a poem in my email that was meant for this sermon. Carrie Newcomer is probably one of my favorite singer-songwriters. I have recently learned that she always writes books of poetry. Her poem, "What You Won't Hear on Cable News." Her newest book of poetry entitled: *Until Now: New Poems*
In her poem What You Won't Hear on Cable News she writes:

What You Won't Hear on Cable News

I want to tell you
What you won't hear on cable news.
About a young woman in the airport
Who was so exhausted and harried
By hours of delay
And wrangling an overtired toddler
That when her little boy
Finally and completely
Melted down
And planted himself on the floor,
She sat down beside him
And started to cry.

I want to tell you about five random women
Who immediately flowed in from all directions.
One pulled out a little toy from her purse,

One offered a snack or to go get something to drink,
 One who called the child "Honey"
 Wiped his nose with a tissue
 And offered another one to the grateful mother.
 And the one who asked if it was alright
 To walk hand in hand with the child
 Right there at the gate,
 Close by and always, always in sight.
 I want to tell you about a man
 Who makes soup and bread
 And then gives it away.
 And the nurse who held his hand
 When he was breathless and afraid.

I want to tell you about my neighbor
 Who drives around all winter
 With snow chains in his car
 Just in case someone needs help.

I want to tell you about all the people I meet
 Who keep extending themselves,
 And braving the risk
 Of being told
 It's none of their business.
 Who offer a hand,
 Or a bit of encouragement,
 Or a couple of bucks.
 Who will walk a fussy child around the gate.
 Because it is the kind thing to do.

I want to tell you the world still turns
 Every single day
 On an axis of goodness
 And unexpected grace
 That shows up without fanfare
 And often where we least expect to find it.

By Carrie Newcomer, From *Until Now: New Poems*

This morning James invites us into a new version of the Quiet Game where we are quick to listen and slow to speak.

May this game change us,
 and change the world around us,
 in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen