

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg  
September 2, 2012

**“On Our Best Behavior”  
(James 1:17-27)**

Today we begin a series of readings from the Letter of James. I like the book of James because it helps the church assess their practices as a community of faith. James is writing to a community with the purpose of helping this community reflect on how they are acting as a Christian community. We must also take this time to reflect on we are acting as Christians at this time and in this place. We must look at ourselves in the mirror and ask whether we are on our best behavior. This short book of only five chapters is organized in a little complicated way. The first chapter is basically a table of contents of the themes and topics that will be discussed in the other chapters. As we read through James in the coming weeks you will notice that the book contains very little Christian teaching. It only refers to Jesus twice, once at the very beginning of the book and then at the beginning of chapter two. However, it calls to question whether we are being the church at its best.

The portion that Wendy read for us today begins with a theological statement that God is the source of every good gift. One would not expect such a theological statement from this letter. The statement continues to say that God is the source of Christian existence. We were brought into the world “so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” We have been created to share those gifts with others. All that we are and all that we have is the Lord's, so let us give it back to the Lord! James puts this theological statement to practice.

He instructs us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for our anger does not produce God's righteousness. We must rid ourselves of all sordidness and receive with meekness the implanted word that can save our souls. For James it is an internal matter...a matter of the heart. God is transforming us inside so that we will conduct ourselves in a loving and peaceful way. How often do we take the time to listen? Are we slow to speak? We've all encountered those conversations when you are sharing something and the other person will interrupt you in order to tell you something about themselves! Better yet, we have someone ask us how we are today and when we proceed to tell them they just walk away. We've all heard the statement that we have two ears and only one mouth so we should do twice as much listening as we do speaking. We must be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. James will return to these themes in chapter 3 when he talks about the taming of the tongue.

The imperative voice of James continues by saying that we must be more than just merely hearers of the word, but also doers of the word. Better yet we can't just speak the words, but we must act out the words! We must put the words of scripture into action. James says that if anyone is a hearer and is not a doer then they are like someone who looks at themselves in the mirror and just simply walks away.

The end of the chapter provides a simple summary of the chapter's message. If a person thinks they are religious and can't constrain their tongues, but deceive their hearts, their religion is basically worthless. James states that true religion is when one cares for orphans and widows in their distress and to be unstained by the world. To be a doer of the word you must take care of those who are overlooked! We must be slow to speak and

quick to listen....what are the needs of the community? How can we be doers of the word and help those who are in need?

The church at its best is when we devote time and energy in giving of our resources to help all who are in need. As I have often told you....the church is the best place for this. When a disaster strikes, it is the church that is there immediately. That is what the church is all about! We are called to share the love of God to all....to be doers of the word! We have witnessed groups of people willing to help when a crisis occurs, but after a while they seem to go away thinking that they have done their job and all is well. But that is not what the church does....when we are on our best behavior we give of ourselves over and over again!

In a little while we will place our offerings on this altar and dedicate them to be used to help us do the ministry that God has called us to do now. We will present with joy the offerings of our life and our labor. Therefore, when we place our offerings in the plate, we are giving our very lives...we are dedicating our lives to follow Christ and to serve God's people who are in need. As the plate is passed around, you are giving more than money.....you are giving yourselves.....you are witnessing the church at its best...you are helping the church to be on their best behavior! God has blessed us... God has created us to be generous people and hopefully we will be a model for the rest of the world on how to act. Remember, we were brought into this world to be a kind of first fruits of God's creatures.

Let us be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Let us be doers of the word. Let us give of ourselves in order to help the orphans and the widows. Let us be on our best behavior. Not just today.....but every day! Amen.

