



Wednesday Prayer

16th Sunday after Pentecost – Listen more and talk less

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. James 3:1-10

In this past year I have been striving to listen more and talk less. Sometimes that's not so hard to do as I tend to be a quieter person. I also understand I have so much to learn from those with lived experience, whether that be an elder or a young person with a particular story to tell. Yet, I'm also one with strong opinions and depending on the topic, I have a lot to say. So in these times of divisiveness around politics, pandemic decisions, social and racial injustices, and changes in family and friendship dynamics – this lesson from James really rings true. When has my tongue been set ablaze with words that harm?

One of my nurse friends has a way of listening to people and then asking follow-up questions to help people think through things differently than they may have before. I'm working on developing this skill, a skill that begins with listening. I've found this to be especially helpful when a survivor of sexual violence shares any part of their story with me – sometimes it may be shared as part of their healing, other times as great grief, and still other times as anger. Listening – never judging or trying to solve away their pain – has been one blessing I can share in these times.

I have a long way to go in many other conversations and with many other people. I will pray for God's wisdom to use my words wisely, to listen more and talk less.

God of endless grace, help us show grace to others as we communicate in difficult and contentious times. Remind us that we are all made in your likeness and teach us to listen and respond in the ways you taught us through your Son. Amen.

Written by Joy McElroy, Cherish All Children Executive Director, and community advocate for racial justice.