

Ministry

James 3: 13-18 and Luke 9: 46-62

Let us pray....Dear God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.

“An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest”

We all need to know and remember...

No Christian community comes together through seeds of discord.

Disagreement isn't the glue that keeps a community together.

I think most people would prefer to avoid conflict...avoid arguments.

If possible, most of us would prefer not to have disagreements.

Disagreements weaken the community, arguments dwindle fellowship.

But here is a historic fact...fights happen, right?

Disagreements occur and arguments ensue...

But church fights are a paradox, right?

As Christians we are loving, caring and forgiving...

Yet fights break out!

I served on a Spiritual Revitalization Team,

here at St Johns about 12 years ago.

It was a team of (6) of us in the Church JB, Kay, John, Wendi, Rick, Bill

And Pastor Barb.

Now this spiritual revitalization team met regularly with the Leaders of the Penn South East Conference and 10 other UCC Churches I think only about 4 or 5 churches completed the 3-year program.

We were one of the churches who finished.

Now during this time, we learned a lot about ourselves, our Church and of course...other churches.

And during one work shop we heard horror stories from other churches about fights breaking out in consistory and or ministry meetings at churches.

While this came a shock to me and the rest of our team...

It wasn't so long ago when our beloved St. Johns had a vicious legal fight alienating many and causing some members to choose sides and even leave the church.

Our Behavioral Covenant, that we read in the beginning of every meeting was born at that workshop.

According to our Gospel lesson this morning:

“An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest”

Now I've witnessed a few fights in my time.

Quite frankly and-

Embarrassingly, I've caused more than my share of disagreements.

And the first verse in this mornings lesson seems
to be at the heart of most arguments...

(Pause) “Who is the greatest?” Donald Trump or Joe Biden?

(Pause) “Who is the most important?” Kamala Harris or Mike Pence?

(Pause) “Who has to have their way?” Democrats or Republicans?

It’s a power struggle....a contest of authority.

(Pause) over my almost 56 years...there are a couple points I’ve learned,
that serve as practical advice in all conflicts.

One is the ministry of holding your tongue.

**The best way to combat evil thoughts is to never put them into
words.**

“The tongue is a little member, but it boasts of great things”

James chapter 3 verse 5.

“A restless evil, full of deadly poison” James 3, verse 8.

James Chapter 1 verse 19 reads:

“Let everyman be quick to hear, slow to speak & slow to anger”

(Pause) “Slow to anger”...some of us (Raise my hand) have a short fuse.

If this is the case...

the first thing is we need to be conscious of it.

Then we can work on controlling it.

The old remedy for this was always count to 10, right?

“Slow to speak”

Proverbs 19 verse 11 reads:

“Good sense makes a man slow to anger”

So maybe if we count to 10, (pause) good sense will return.

In the verbal, emotional heat of an argument...

We can say things we don't mean to say.

Harsh, untrue and ugly words can be uttered.

And while we are sorry afterwards....(pause) the damage is done.

Unrepairable damage....things that cut and hurt deeply.

Wounds can be inflicted that take years to heal...

Some wounds never heal....do they?

(Pause) Some of you may have heard this before

There's a story about a young boy who had a bad temper.

So his father gave him a bag of nails and told him

that every time he lost his temper,

he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day, the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger,

the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down.

He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all.

So he told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper.

The days passed and the boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

Then his father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence.

He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence.

The fence will never be the same.

When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one.

You can put a knife in a man and draw it out.

It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry.

The wound is still there."

And verbal wounds can hurt just as much as physical ones...can't they?

(Pause) So we can control our tongue....(1)

We can be slow to anger...(2) .

We can also learn to overlook or ignore offensives.(3)

Sometimes we can be too sensitive....or over sensitive.

We can simply be too easily offended.

We take everything to heart...we take it on the chin.

Maybe we need to learn to turn the other cheek...don't strike back.

Is this thing that offended you really worth the battle?

Proverbs 19 verse 11 says:

“Good sense makes a man slow to anger and it is His glory to overlook an offense.”

Some people are just looking for a fight, aren't they?

I have a friend that tells me:

Life is about choices and decisions, and I refuse to give people permission to offend me.

So those of us that can follow these three rules:

Control your tongue...be slow to anger...and don't be so sensitive...

(Pause) I believe will have a long, fulfilling life!

What does Jesus do regarding the argument of who's the greatest?

(Pause) He puts a child beside him!

And then he says:

“Whoever receives this child receives me and him who sent me”

We are to receive on another

We are to accept one another

We are to love one another

As we do this, we receive Jesus....we accept Jesus...we love Jesus.

We are not called to judge one another

We are not called to find fault with one another

We are not called to offend one another...or inflict pain on one another.

(Pause) no.... rather we are to receive on another.

Finally, Jesus says:

He who is least among you all is the one who is the greatest”

(Pause) Does any one else find it strange that we never have arguments as to who is least?

(Pause) Maybe we just don't take Jesus seriously, but we should!

We are called to serve one another

Mark 9; verse 35 says we should be “servants to all”

We are called to minister to one another.

We are called to help and comfort one another.

It's difficult for the rich to associate with the poor.

It's difficult for the wise to associate with the ignorant.

It's difficult for the proud to associate with the humble.

But if we don't....well then....

It's difficult for any of these to associate with the Kingdom of God.

Paul said: “Think not of yourself more highly than you ought”

Romans chapter 12: verse 3

Things can be very difficult out there...

We as Christians can change that...

This world really ain't so bad...(pause)

But the eternal Kingdom of Heaven is amazing.

And when speaking about heaven in Matthew 20

Jesus says: "the first will be last and the last will be first, for many are called, but few are chosen."

Amen.