

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## SHUT UP! (LISTEN...)

**The Rev. Andrew F. Kline**

Text of a Sermon preached the 16th Sunday after Pentecost

September 12, 2021

ISAIAH 50:4-9A | PSALM 116:1-8

JAMES 3:1-12 | MARK 8:27-38

Often, the most important conversations in life, the most important conversation we need to have right now, is the conversation we don't want to have.

I don't know whether you caught it in translation, but just now both Peter and Jesus have raised their voices, they have told each other to shut up. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him! Jesus called Peter a very bad name. This was not just a conversation that got a little heated. This was each other saying, shut up, listen if you want, but I'm going to tell you something you don't want to hear.

The conversations we are trying to avoid are the conversations we have to have. Why did planes fly into two iconic buildings, two proud symbols of our culture, as an act of war. Why is yet another powerful empire not able to defeat tyranny from without, and is defeated by corruption from within, in a small little backwater called Afghanistan? Why are the winds, the fires, and the floods coming more often the days, and with more destruction? Why don't people, good people, just trust their political and scientific leaders and just roll up their sleeves and get a shot?

Why are we not a better judge of risk and reward, of how much we need each other, of one another's motives? Finally, why is everyone not happy in this household, in this marriage, in this church, deep down in our souls, in our spirit?

Jesus grew up steeped in the great prophecies of Isaiah about the renewal and restoration of God's people. He no doubt spent hours on the dramatic turn that takes place within verses of Isaiah 50. "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word." But suddenly the prophet turns this gift on its head. "Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught."

And by listening, not by speaking, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah does not turn backward, but presses forward to understand the experience of those he would teach. And he understands, and therefore comes to be a teacher, by empathizing, no, more than empathizing, going through the suffering of his students, bearing the burden of his people.

In the time of Isaiah's prophecy, the great task was for the returning exiles to understand the experience of those who had stayed, who had struggled without leadership and guidance for seventy years, unappreciated, powerless, resentful of all their leaders had failed to be and do.

It was no picnic when the exiles returned from Babylon. There were some very frank conversations. There was an absolute need to face the facts, to turn their backs on one another, not to dismiss each other, but to bear each other's burdens and do the work of

rebuilding and renewing what had been lost. And then, even that was not enough. The old ideas about the Messiah were not going to be enough. A new teaching, a new learning, needed to take place.

No doubt we, in our moment, are suffering from a crisis of empathy, of being incapable of understanding how our tribal instincts and culture of disinformation is breaking us down and needlessly separating us on all sides. Sadly, we can live so much in our own bubbles, that we think we don't have to have the conversations that we really need to have with one another.

The truth is never simple. The truth is never easy. The truth is never actually the only thing we need. We need the next truth and the next truth after that to set us on our path toward one another and the answers we need. But it remains always true that the truth will set us free. That's what Jesus said: The truth will set you free. And that's what Jesus did for Peter and for his disciples in that moment when he described for them what would happen to him, and what their discipleship might look like.

You have to love how with such clear eyes St. James sees the issue. He completely despairs over the power of the tongue, its ability, as such a small thing, to do such great damage. He admits, "no one can tame it." I am reminded of the old response to an intemperate outburst: "And you kiss you mother with that mouth?!"

Even so, admitting all that, we can see that we have no other choice. Just shut up. Listen if you want to. But the Lord, the universe, your world, your nation, your friends, your co-workers, your family all have something to say to you!

What is the conversation you need to have today?

May the Lord God give you the tongue of a teacher, which is first and foremost the tongue of a listener, a learner, a partner, and a sharer in the lives you touch and influence.

Remember why Jesus was sent into the world, and just how much that surprised the powers that be, and trust that that same power of faith, that same power of empathy, that same willingness to face the facts whatever they may be, is the ground of change, of hope, of love itself.

And when we are caught up short, in need of learning a new lesson, let us not be ashamed, but remember that we all are struggling together to share in the great salvation of the one who had to face every disgrace even death on the cross, for us to see – and to experience, what it truly means to be set free.