



“The Day the Air Conditioning Went Out”
Scripture – Psalm 1 and James 3: 5-12
Sermon Preached by Jacqueline Taylor
Sunday, August 18, 2013

This is a transcript of an ACTUAL radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland:

“Canadians: Please divert your course 15 degrees South to avoid a collision.

Americans: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees North to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

Americans: THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES' ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH, I SAY AGAIN, THAT'S ONE-FIVE DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER-MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP.

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call.”

Conflict is inevitable! A few weeks ago, I returned from Big Tent, a PC(USA) gathering filled with excitement, glorious music, news of new church developments, faithful people...a freezing cold convention center and news of the latest Presbyterian conflict. Speaking of freezing cold convention centers, how many of you grew up without AC? I don't think I had AC in our family home until the early 1970's when my parents got a big clunky air conditioner for our dining room window. Until then and even then we had a large 4 foot attic fan. Our attic fan was loud. You could hear it go “whompa” through the entire four level house. But after a while it blended in. The good thing about it was that you could feel the cool/temperature change when it was turned on and ultimately, it cooled the whole house.

Cool is a good thing. We have to admit that even our language reflects our feeling about these temperature variations: hot under the cooler/cool under pressure. Hot and bothered/cool as a cucumber or heated argument/cool, calm and collected.

My summer sermon this morning is brought to you by the New Testament lesson from the book of James. The Book of James dated from approximately 46-49 A.D. This 59th out of 66 books of the Bible was authored by a servant of God named James. (Some might say it was Jesus' brother.)

Chapter 3 begins with instructions for church teachers and ultimately church leaders, you know...us! Simply put, in order to be an effective church leader and ultimately Christian, you must be about to maintain a certain level of self-discipline related to how you speak to fellow believers. Uh-oh! As we might imagine the early church was filled with conflicts, probably more than we have today. Different opinions on theology and practice were the norm as different communities with different traditions and past religious influences struggled to be faithful in fast changing times. Church leaders were at the helm and needed to be able to relate to all of these factions in ways that defused conflict instead of creating it. In modern terms, you have to be cool or as my daughter's generation might say "chillax"!!!

It's not easy to keep your cool these times. Forget for a moment about General Assembly; let's take a page out of personal lives. A day probably doesn't go by that you don't get cut off on the road driving, get behind a slow driver or be tailgated by a reckless one. People behind the counter can be rude, meter maids relentless, computers slow, email hacked, traffic backed up, you name it. James wants me to control my tongue? It's hard enough out here.

A young man walks with a baby stroller with a crying baby inside. The young man speaks quietly, "Calm down George, don't scream, Joshua, quiet, Joshua." An elderly woman passing by stops and tells him, "I see you are really patient with your son Joshua"...The man answers, "I am Joshua".

Friends, the Word of God through the book of James reminds us to, as my aunt might say: "watch our mouths". If we can guard our speech and let the Spirit of God move through us, we would be a lot better off. Regardless of the heat, we can remain calm and thoughtful.

I'd like to illustrate the need for us to stay on the cool side of things by telling you a personal story. Like many homes, I have air conditioning. Air conditioning does two things when you think about it. It takes outside air, runs it through a system and cools it down. Or, it takes stifling inside air re-circulates it and cools it down. It's something that we all need at one time or another, to be refreshed. For us Christians, God is that for us.

Anyway it's 1:00 in the morning. I hear the faint whirr of the air conditioner wafting through the vents. Half an hour later, I notice that the air conditioner had not shut off as it does when I put it on auto. Half hour later, it's starting to feel warm. Hey maybe it's me. You know ladies, personal summers and all. Got out of bed and looked at thermostat. Blowing at 70 degrees but the place was 82 and rising. It was the day the air conditioning went out. Blower was going – no cool air. Brothers and sisters, James knew about this phenomenon when he talked about the tongue. He likened it to fire, something hot. When you get overheated you start to feel uncomfortable, sweaty, and irritable. When you are speaking and nothing edifying, calming or gentle is coming from you, you are like that air conditioner, blower is going but there is nothing of any value coming out.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 says if you have not love, your words are like noisy gongs and clanging symbols.

Well, after I checked the thermostat, I realize now at 2 a.m. that this thing was really not working. How long has this been going on? It's amazing in church life that the heat sometimes has gone on so long that we don't do

anything about it until its way too late. The hot untamed fire of our tongues has begun to scorch and consume us and all around us there is strife.

So next, I get up and open the window hoping to vent the place, but as you might imagine, the air outside was just as hot as it was inside. Christians, we make the mistake of looking at one another and say, if this person or group would just leave the church and stop arguing everything will be fine. Verse 6 of our text says that negative talk affects the whole body. What makes us think that it would be cooler somewhere else or without someone else? Peace begins within.

Finally, I realized that I needed something to cool the place down so I got out my fan and turned it on. You guessed it, it blew out air, but it re-circulated the same hot air that was in the room. So I put the fan next to a window. The window in my room faces east so I needed a western breeze. So I had to move the fan to the front room. In order to make a change, to allow the wind of the Spirit to blow into our lives and in our church, we have to sometimes get up and move. Do something different. Leave the familiar and the comfortable way of acting and behaving and allow the peace of Christ to come in.

When the person came to fix my unit, he said I had a leak somewhere that had yet to be discovered. So until that time, he would fill up the unit with Freon® and I would be good to go for awhile.

Sisters and Brothers, all of us have undiscovered leaks. Our perspectives, how we grew up, what we believe about scripture or God and our personal experiences all influences how we see the world and how we conduct ourselves in the family of God. Therefore, we will not agree in our homes, at work, in public or in the church at all times. It's the human condition!

A rookie pitcher was struggling at the mound, so the catcher walked out to have a talk with him. "I've figured out your problem," he told the young man. "You always seem to lose control at the same point in every game." "When is that?" asked the kid. "Right after the National Anthem."

The next verse I didn't read from the text is verse 12. It says, "do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom. Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. Real wisdom, God's wisdom begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings. "Our tongue doesn't have to ignite problems, it can speak with love."

Oh, and one more thing about air conditioning. It is plugged in to our electrical system. Now that's the kind of fire we need – the Holy Spirit. May it be for us! And may our air-conditioning never go out!

Prayers of the People ~ Reverend Tom Stout

Merciful God, with the whole realm of nature around us, we bring you our praises and petitions of this day. Lord, hear our prayers.

We pray for peace in our world, especially in the streets and towns of Egypt, and Syria, and Afghanistan, and Iraq; and we pray for peace in our midst, in our cities, and neighborhoods, and families, and in our own hearts. Lord, hear our prayers.

We pray for those effected by the forces of nature in this past week and in this day, especially for those combating the wild fires in the western parts of our country, those face with too much rain and flooding in the states of the south, and for those who face drought and too much dryness, be it around them or within them. Lord, hear our prayers.

We pray for all who prepare to return to classrooms in schools, colleges, universities, and centers for continuing education. We pray for students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and especially for those who seek and who provide funds sufficient to meet the demands of education. Lord, hear our prayers.

O Christ, breathe now your Spirit upon us and through us, that we too may become signs of your presence and love within this world we share. Amen