

SCARED SPEECHLESS?

(Tongue twister : Peter Piper)

The letter of James shows one of the church's early pastors going about his work of confronting, diagnosing and dealing with areas of misbelief and misbehavior. James is on about 'doing' what Jesus taught not just believing it. In his list of 'doings', he includes speaking. Now that's bound to be confronting.

James, probably the brother of Jesus and leader or bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, in his letter to the Hebrew-Christians living in non-Christian environments writes, 'By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony into chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it... You can tame a horse but it's far more difficult to tame your tongue.... With our tongues we bless God, our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!' (from James 3)

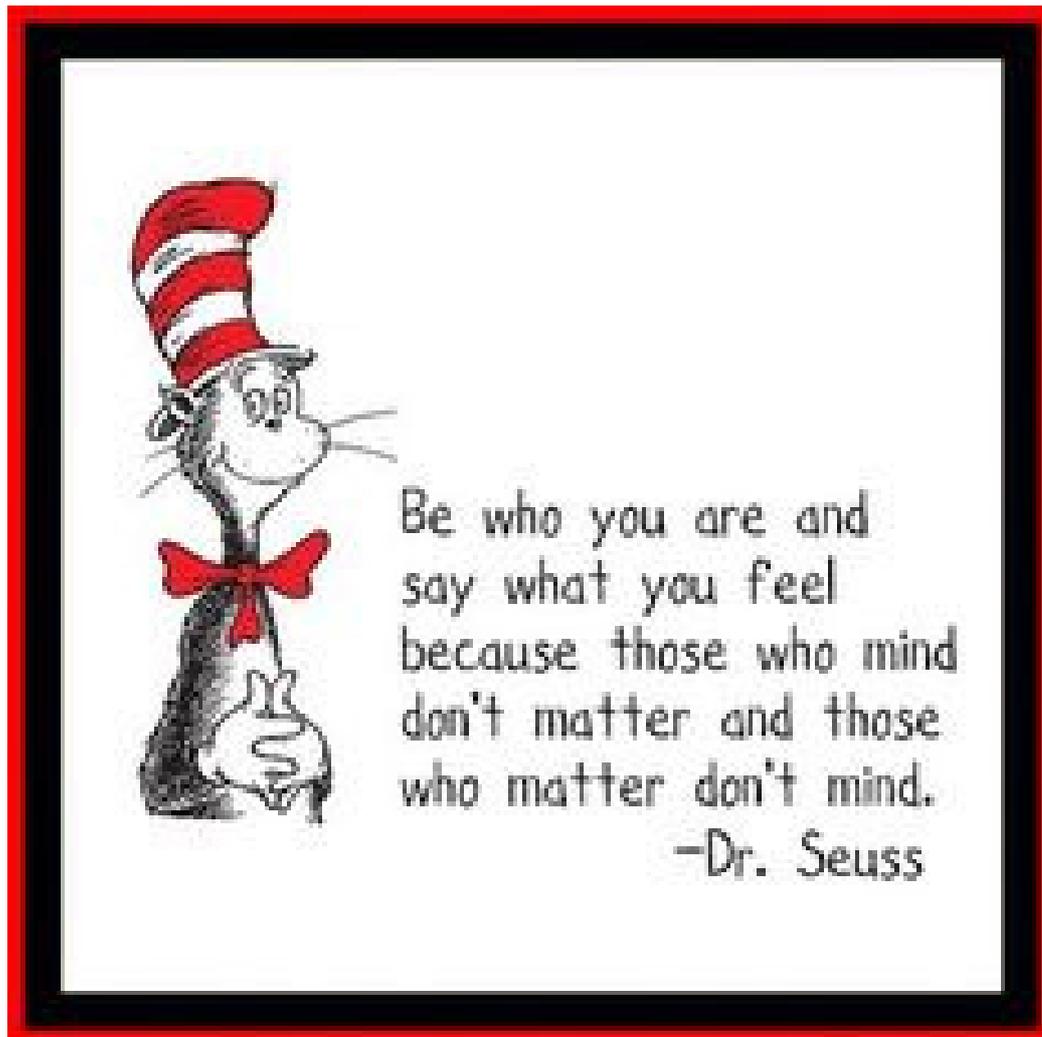
'Throughout James' letter the key characteristic is INTEGRITY – practicing what we profess, living out what we believe, genuinely allowing our faith to influence and shape our lifestyle. We are to continue to pattern our lives according to what we have experienced of God... consistency, generosity, graciousness, self-giving, life-giving. Simply attending church week-in, week-out isn't enough. Having the right beliefs isn't enough. A genuine faith is to be seen in how we speak to others – with moderation, compassion and generosity, in ways that are life-giving and life-affirming. A genuine faith is to be seen in not 'deceiving' our hearts. The word used for deceiving actually means indulging.'

'Living the Christian life isn't about self-indulgence. It's not about putting profits, power, privilege or possessions ahead of people. It's not about maintaining *my* sense of comfort at the expense of others. It's the opposite - 'maintaining other's sense of comfort at my own expense'. A genuine faith is seen in how we care – how we treat the most vulnerable and marginalized in our society. According to James, 'care' doesn't mean giving a handout, or sending off a donation to ease the conscience. It means engaging in genuine practical assistance. James says offer support, walk alongside them - he calls it 'visiting' - and it's not just once but again and again. It then will become a way of life, a habitual practice.' Craig de Vos

I wonder - are we scared speechless today of saying the word 'God' let alone 'Jesus'? But why are we afraid to talk about God? No longer can we say that religion, like politics is a private matter. If we are going to have any real effect on global evil practices carried out in the name of religion by all faiths, we will need to speak out in our communities. We need to pray for new skills in living the Jesus way. What good is truth if we don't know how to live it? My own flawed practice is to 'earn the right' to speak having developed a relationship with another.

So this letter is an addition to the words of Jesus. Here and there across Syria and Asia Minor groups of Jewish exiles would gather and listen while one of their number read the letter from home. They listen and learn as if their very lives depend on it. One day perhaps we will need to listen like that and live the Gospel in ways unknown before.

Perhaps Dr Seuss throws some light on it all.



Those who can control their speech are to be admired. James practiced what he preached. According to tradition his nickname was 'Old camel knees' because of the thick callouses from years of prayer. May our knees get callouses and not our tongues. AMEN

rdb.StThomas.13/09/15

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