

Prayer of the Week:

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, The Second Sunday of Epiphany)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.



Patience & Endurance

James 1:2-4; 5:7-11

January 17th

Intro

The book of James is named after the author, who is the half-brother of Jesus.

The book is the legacy of James' wisdom. It is written like a letter, but for a wide audience of Jesus' followers. James is especially influenced by Jesus' collection of teaching that we know as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

The beginning of the letter introduces the major themes and teachings of the book as a whole. The rest is broken into 12 lessons about wholehearted devotion to God. These lessons touch on different parts of our lives and are filled with some pretty powerful one-liners.

These hard-hitting one-liners have given the book a reputation of getting right in your business and challenging you about what it means to practice faith everyday.

Growth In Suffering

“whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” -James 1:2-4 (NRSV)

According to the logic of James, 2020 is to be considered one of the most joy-filled years because of the trials we all faced.

This is jarring. Upsetting even.

This isn't coming from someone who had it nice and easy in life. James personally experienced poverty, famine, and persecution. These words are not cheap cliché from someone who has lived in the lap of luxury. They are words from someone who has suffered deeply. So, let's listen to what is being said....

There is a string of events talked about in this passage. First, the trial comes.

The trial produces endurance. Some translations say "patience." We often associate trial with the loss of something (security, health, relationship), but the claim of the biblical writer (who himself has lost so much) is that in this time of withering, something is also being produced.

While counter-intuitive, our experience often bears this out. Isn't it true that when we catalogue our lives, we look back at easy and joyful times with fondness and nostalgia, but it is the most difficult times in our lives that we'll point to that changed us, transformed us, helped us grow.

We are to be joyful, not because of the trial itself or the things that have been lost. We are to be joyful because in the midst of the trial, God is growing something in us that will bring us to greater maturity.

God Is Working

In chapter 5, James employs the metaphor of the farmer who plants seeds and then waits.

I remember visiting my Grandpa's farm as a child. There were seasons when it appeared that the field was nothing but dirt. During my week-long visits, he would go out to the field everyday and everyday it looked the same - just dirt. Was he wasting his time? Has the crop failed?

The answer, of course, was neither.

It wasn't an empty field. Seeds had been planted. It was a harvest in progress.

What a beautiful metaphor for life. Sometimes what appears to be an empty field is actually a harvest in progress.

I'm convinced that part of the wisdom of James is that our lives are not to be blown side to side by every trial. Rather, we are to be anchored to the immovable God; patient for the work of God to be completed.

“Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.” -James 1:2-4 (The Message)