

Weekly Bible Study September 23, 2018

Readings: James 3:1-12; 13-4:3; 7-8; Mark 1:35-45; Luke 6:27-36

Theme: Kindness and Vulnerability

Last week we looked at a specific story in Mark's gospel (in our readings) where Jesus is given a choice to heal a leper or not. Jesus, of course does this act of kindness. The theme of the message could be boiled down to this: We can choose to be kind or we can choose not to be. One bears the fruit of the kingdom that Jesus often talks about, while the other does not. The charge was just as simple, "Go out and do a random act of kindness in your community" as a way to spread God's love throughout the world. This is a feel good message isn't it? And who doesn't like it when someone does something kind for you?

But what happens when Jesus calls you to show the same kindness to someone who doesn't merely not like you but down right hates you? How can you love someone who does not love you and wishes you harm? Not only does it feel like Jesus is asking us to do the impossible but he's also setting us up to get hurt, or worst, rejected. In essence, to be kind means we must also be vulnerable. Why would Jesus want us to be so open to attack? Because it also opens us up to be loved. God's love especially tears down the walls between enemies, it finds a way to connect us not by hatred but by kindness. When we let go of our ego, or as Richard Rohr calls it our 'false self' our façade begins to crumble apart and our 'true self' is seen. Just the way God intended. When people see our true selves then they also see God.

Read: James 3:1-12; Proverbs 21:23-24

The book of James is a theologically fascinating and often frustrating as well. Martin Luther called it "a right strawy epistle" because he thought it contradicted Paul's teachings, especially Paul's justification of faith by grace alone (Read Romans 1:16-17). I would argue back, be careful because what we say matters. The tongue can be both a blessing and a curse; the same organ we use to praise God can and often is used for cursing another. Thus we need to watch what we say. And this is especially true for anyone who is teaching the Word of God, for we can do more harm than good if we are not careful.

- Q:** Which parts of this passage make you feel the most vulnerable or susceptible to attack from someone (or yourself)?
- Q:** In what ways are you a teacher, and how might God judge you according to your words that you teach?
- Q:** How have these particular verses brought you to a deeper understanding of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ? Is there one sentence or word that stands out to you?

Prayer: Guide my tongue today, Lord Christ, so that I might proclaim the truth and nothing but the truth about your goodness and grace. Set it ablaze for your glory. Amen.

Read: James 3:13-4:3; 7-8; 1 Kings 3:9-12;

In James's 108 verses there are 54 imperatives, which may go a long way towards explaining why the letter isn't the most popular in the church. We don't like being told what to do. What is most beautiful about this passage is that speaks of the value of submitting to God. The author names conflicting wisdoms that might govern our actions and responses. There is "earthly, unspiritual, devilish" wisdom in society. And "wisdom from above" that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, full of mercy..." Throughout the bible, our trouble always arrives when we act based on our own earthly wisdom and not on God's righteousness (charity towards our neighbor). It is our faithfulness to the "wisdom from above" that spurs us to act gently, justly, and in ways that will yield "good fruits."

Q: Which part of this passage challenges your kindness and vulnerability?

Q: In times of conflict, how do you find your peace? Do you submit yourself?

Q: How have these particular verses brought you to a deeper understanding of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Blessed Jesus, shine your light upon us so that we might see your wisdom and glory, and choose to follow in your pathway, today and everyday. Amen.

Read: Mark 9:30-37; Luke 6:27-36

After describing the disciples' continued misunderstanding of Jesus' passion prediction, this passage shows us their misunderstanding of Jesus' values. Is it because it makes them vulnerable? Jesus, who came into this world as a vulnerable baby, understands their fear, but it doesn't negate the way we ought to treat one another with a heavenly ethic, instead of the hierarchical norms of society. Luke gives us a clear examples of such an ethic. As the disciples will go on to argue who will be the greatest, Jesus will tell them it will be the one who makes themselves the most vulnerable; a reverse of earthly expectations. Jesus illustrates his point by taking a little child and telling his disciples that service to such a child is indistinguishable from service to him. And the one who sent him – the one who showed mercy and love to you. So go and do likewise.

Q: How does showing love and kindness make you feel vulnerable?

Q: Who in your community are the most vulnerable, and what would it mean for us to treat them as though they were proxies for God?

Q: How have these particular verses brought you to a deeper understanding of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to be more like you and less like me today. Amen.

Slow Read: Psalm 1 *"Happy are those who... take delight in the law of the Lord!"*

Meditate on a word or phrase that speaks to where you are in your faith journey today. And may the Spirit of the Lord guide you closer towards the truth of Jesus Christ.