

Good evening!

Sunday we lit the Memorial Candle for Annie Mae Farrin Gilbert. A service will be held for her at the church Friday at 11:00 with a reception following. Because Annie and her family know and love Rick Newell (?), he will officiate at her service. I have asked Anne Pinkham and Dusty Hancock to let us know how we can support them.

We have four people (including me) participating in the Icon Retreat Workshop which began today. It is a fascinating and reflective process. Because of the workshop, we will not have Bible Study this week.

Going forward, now that school has started, I have to be up in the Bristol area Fridays. Would it work to move Bible Study to Fridays after this week? And speaking of Friday. Would anyone be able to attend snackpacking this Friday at the church in Bristol beginning at 11:30 and deliver the snacks to the South Bristol school? My sister's surgery is Friday and I would like be with my parents that day.

I arrived Sunday morning with the sermon half done. I knew what I wanted to say, but it was such a whirlwind in my head, that I found it difficult to put on paper so I prayed for ordered thoughts as I spoke Sunday. I will try to recreate what I said best I can!

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING** Song of Solomon 2:8-13-This Sunday marks a transition from kings and prophets to Solomon, not as king, but as Solomon the Wise. We move into the Wisdom literature and begin with a selection from the Song of Solomon, love poetry that has been attributed to Solomon historically, containing beautiful love poems between a groom and bride on their wedding day. The references to springtime and beauty capture the awareness of young love, in those early days, when everything is wonderful and the possibilities for love are endless. The New Testament reading this morning is from James known as the New Testament wisdom literature and suggests that this reading from Solomon is about all the good things that come from God.

**NEW TESTAMENT** James 1:17-27 This morning we begin the first in five readings from the Letter of James, which reminds us in verse 17 that 'religion pure and undefiled is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep one's self unstained by the world.' The writer calls those listening to be doers of the word, not just those that hear it. We are called not to be guided by anger and rage, but rather by compassion. We are called to do the right thing and help those in need around us-this is what it means to be faithful to God. James is the brother of Jesus. His letter is full of hebraisms and its style of argument is characteristically semitic. It was intended for Jewish converts familiar with the Old Testament. It is more a sermon than a letter. It may be an answer to Paul's wrtings on faith.

**GOSPEL**

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23-The verses selected from Mark 7 illustrate a great difference between Jesus and some of those teaching in his day. Jesus is much more concerned with how you treat others than following traditional rules. Jesus and his disciples are called out for not washing their hands-and this had nothing to do with hygiene but rather ritual 'cleaning; of one's self from anything unclean-that is, sinful. Jesus calls out the way we treat others, the things we say about other people, what we do that harms others-this is what is truly unclean, not whether one pours water over their hands or not.

**MESSAGE**

*Walking the walk...*

Beth Hood

Writing to a Denmark filled with 'Christian' people who didn't act very Christian, Soren Kierkegaard told this little parable. Once upon a time, there was a land inhabited only by ducks. Every Sunday morning, the ducks got up, washed their faces, put on their Sunday clothes, and waddled off to church. They waddled through the door of their duck church, proceeded down the aisle, and took their familiar places in the pews. The duck minister entered the pulpit and opened the duck Bible to the place where it talked about God's greatest gift to ducks-wings. "With wings we can fly. With wings we can soar like eagles. With wings we can except the confines of pens and cages. With wings we can become free. With wings we can become all God meant us to be. So give thanks to God for your wings. And fly!" All the ducks loudly quacked, "Amen". And then all of the ducks waddled back home.

Fourteen weeks after Pentecost we have been reading from the letters of Paul who taught justification by faith alone. James' epistle is best known for the phrase: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers." I used to prefer James to Paul. Paul was more cerebral, James is more 'hands on'. But the two are not necessarily in contention. The truly wise, truly faithful person is known not for what they say they believe, but in how they live what they believe. Wisdom is about being able to live well the truth that we believe and the faith that we embrace.

James only mentions his brother, Jesus, twice; but he is filled with the teaching of Jesus. If Paul preached a Christ who was priest and king, James presents Christ the prophet and teacher. James is fulfilling the Great Commission, making disciples by 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

James' letter provides many instructions for what we should do and how we should act. These aren't really a problem for Christians, in the first century of James, the sixteenth century of Martin Luther, or the twenty first century, who hold fast to the Word and depend on God's grace. James' letter is grounded in grace and celebrates the 'new birth',

the new life we experience as we participate "in God's kingdom work of reclaiming the world." James isn't writing about the call to a sudden conversion; he's writing about how to 'let God's word, already implanted in our hearts, have its full effect in our lives."

James instructs us to place others before ourselves in order to put into practice what we know. We are to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When we practice these characteristics, we genuinely put others before ourselves and show them the kindness and respect of Christ. The hard part, of course, is being consistent in our conduct; James reminds us that our anger and haste do not accomplish the righteousness of God.

We are to be humble and remove all filthiness and wickedness. Such acts show we are thinking of others before we are thinking of ourselves and placing their interests before our own. A lifestyle characterized by thinking of others first demonstrates that the word has been implanted in the soul of that individual.

James pleads with us to be doers of the Word and not mere hearers. The warning is strong for those who do not do the Word-they are deluding themselves. These words call for personal examination. Each of us should reflect on our own lives to see if we apply what we know. Spiritual maturity is not based on what you know, but on what you do with what you know.

Application of God's Word is the real test for our walk with God. James argues that we deceive ourselves when we do not apply the Bible. Some of the strongest words in all of Scripture warn of self-deception. It is not enough for us to hear and read the Bible if we do not put into practice what we know. As examples James cites our ability or inability to bridle the tongue and our willingness to minister to widows and orphans-those with great need.

All of us need to be reminded of the necessity of putting into practice what we know to do. All of us need encouragement and help from time to time to be strong enough to keep practicing what we know is right.

Where are we willing to turn our lives upside down to put into practice what we know is right?

Shortly after the blessing of the fleet last spring, I wrote a letter to the Editor of the Lincoln County News which was never printed. I said that I thought the efforts to remove God from the occasion had backfired. I don't know how closely people paid attention to the words spoken in blessing before, but I know every one there now waits for the sneeze and "God bless you." James advises us to do more than wait.

We light the candle of peace and justice every week. Symbolically, I carry the light of Christ out into the world. I hope it doesn't actually stop in the Narthex.

Lois Allen told me the story of several years ago when after days of terrible weather, the lobstermen were finally able to get out and check their traps. They came straight from their boats to the church that Sunday morning and lined the back of the church. She also told me of people who had lived in South Bristol their whole lives, for generations no longer felt welcome some places. I have to assume that our church is one of those places and it saddens me. So many times people are mentioned to me with the caveat, "he/she used to come to this church." What would James have us do to reach out to our neighbors? How do we become 'doers of the word' right here?

People across the nation this past week who were tuned in to morning news saw three people gunned down. Were we shocked, horrified? Or was it just another day of violence in our country? I don't support taking people's guns. I don't think that's the answer. I heard someone suggest that one reason is our loss of community. When I worked at Halcyon Yarn, I noticed that more and more people don't even make eye contact. Where are the neighbors welcoming neighbors, caring for neighbors, block parties (except for Linda Brunner's lobster bake), occasions when neighbors come together just to come together. This community is wonderful responding to anyone who needs help. But what about just coming together to come together, showing our children that everyone matters and like ripples from a skipping rock bringing back the feeling that we are more alike than we are different and that civility and compassion have an important role in our society. How would James advise us to be 'doers'?

If we look back to the time of Paul and James, a time of violence and persecution, do we recognize that the world is not so very different today? I remember when I learned about the Holocaust looking at my mother and asking "how did everyone let that happen?" We are the generations that proclaim, 'never again, never again.' And yet there are Christians, Muslims and Jews being crucified today, being burned alive, being raped and sold into slavery and subjected to horrors we cannot even imagine. We don't have to imagine. It comes into our living rooms every day. And do we say again, 'never again'? Or do we change the channel and look the other way? There is nothing we can do. Really? Is that James would say? There are several efforts afoot to get those people out of Iraq, Syria, Libya. I am familiar with some of them and would be happy to talk to any of you about them. I don't want to look at my granddaughters and say, 'yes, it happened and there was nothing I could do.' Whatever I can do, whatever you can do can be done better in community. Whether it's letting someone in South Bristol know that we miss them and would welcome them back; or looking someone in the eye and

asking, 'how are you?' and waiting to hear the answer; or working with others to bring a Christian family out of the way of persecution.

May God give us the grace and strength to help and encourage one another to put into practice what we know.