

Proverbs 17:27-28, James 1:19-25

“Just do it”

It is great to be behind the pulpit again following the two largest Sundays of the year for us. It's interesting that in most churches the Sunday after Easter is the lowest Sunday of the year, but not here, you all really came out for Youth Sunday, and didn't they do an amazing job? I know some of us are saying, who knew? Who knew we had such amazing and talented kids? Probably a few of us, but they still blew us away.

We've been away from James now for nearly a month. You're starting to get attached to it aren't you, just like the Gospel of John. Maybe we need a bit of a refresher course. James is thought to be written by the brother of whom? That's right, Jesus. It was a letter written in a culture of crisis as these new believers in Jesus Christ were being driven out by the Jews from the synagogues and the Romans were starting to identify them as a threat to the government, and so they were being sought out in order to be executed. It was a bit of a controversial book and especially Martin Luther was not a big fan of it. Today's verses, in fact, contain some truths that pushed Luther to call this book in the Bible, this Epistle, the Epistle of straw.

Our verses focus today on action. As Protestants we tend to shy away from any association between our actions and our salvation. We use the line that our actions ought to come as a result of our gratitude for our salvation. Which is true. As a result when you travel around the world in developed countries you see schools and hospitals and development work being done by Presbyterians as a result of our gratitude for our salvation, not so that we would be saved. We emphasize faith over action, but actions certainly do follow.

Today we are going to buck that Protestant trend which can lead to inaction and focus on just doing it. We are going to focus on action because James does in these verses. How does what we do reflect who we are and it has to reflect to whom we belong.

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In this culture of crisis James writes and begins these words with a command: You must understand this. If you forget everything else I say today, at least understand this. And then in vs. 19 he gives us a recipe for respect: Let everyone, not just the women, or the youth, no one has an exemption, but let everyone: be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. So important. These words reflect our first Scripture in Proverbs that say: one who spares words is knowledgeable, slow to speak, one who is cool in spirit has understanding, slow to anger.

But even Paul in Romans conveys a similar message in a very powerful way: Romans 10:17 – “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” A measured approach, Jesus tells us shapes how we act and certainly what we say. So what does this say about Just do it? When James talks about actions generated out of our love for Christ he needs to be sure that our motives are pure. Sometimes best intentions and lack of listening or understanding can lead to tragic results.

We want to spread the Gospel but force the villagers into monogamous relationships thereby driving their women away from a stable environment and into prostitution. As missionaries we didn't listen. We are beginning a housing project here in Strasburg, but before we go any further we want to listen to Michelle Holland. Uninformed action taken leads often to tragic results. Or the one who feels he is losing the argument normally strikes the first blow.

So James equips us here in these first two verses to Just do it, to take action which is knowledgeable. He follows it up with verse 21 where we are encouraged to strip of all that prevents us from representing, acting on behalf of our Savior. Rid yourselves is the same wording used to disrobe, take off, peel off from yourselves all that is clinging to you that is dirty. A friend of mine was a pastor in West Virginia in the coal mining areas back when the dust and soot around the mines were everywhere. He went to visit a mine with a parishioner from the area and as they stood in the entrance of the mine with the dust and grime everywhere, he noticed this beautiful white flower, completely clean and without any dust on it at all. Wow, he said, someone sure must love this flower and take care of it for it to be so clean. The parishioner reached down, picked up some ash and soot and threw it on the flower, and it just slid right off it, looking as pristine as ever.

The man explained, “It has a natural enamel which prevents any dust from clinging to it. It must have been created especially for such a place as this.” Take off any filth that may cling to you, James tells us. You can't just do it, representing our Savior, when you have rank growth of wickedness weighing you down. You see in vs. 21 where it states sordidness. In Greek, when that term was used in a medical sense it described ear wax. I know pretty gross, but really interesting, because too much ear wax prevents you from what? Hearing, and as Paul says faith comes by hearing. People ask me how many languages have I learned and I am happy to say that I have learned how to listen, or how to be silent in 6 different languages. Rid yourselves of all that which would prevent you from hearing before you act and look like a fool.

Now let's talk about doing. Verse 21 tells us that the Word was implanted in our hearts to save our souls. Like the parable of the sower in Matthew, once that word is planted, we have to do it. Verse 22 tells us, again, once we have been prepared by being quick to listen, slow to speak, and especially slow to anger. Once we have stripped off all that would make us unclean then we have to do the Word.

There comes a time when you hear, understand, sit in the pew, come to programs, get your kids plugged in, but there comes a time when you just have to do it. This is true in life in general: you can hear someone tell you how to hit a 150 yard 8 iron but unless you do it over and over again, hearing isn't enough. You can hear someone tell you how to cut tobacco, but unless you do it more than once, you really don't know. You can hear someone tell you you have to love your wife, but unless you put it into action, it doesn't help hearing it. Practice makes perfect. There is no substitute for just doing it. That's what James ultimately wants us to learn today.

Once you've gone through the training and learned to listen, to not speak, to be slow to anger, once you've stripped yourself of the evil that clings to you, then you have no excuse to just do it. I think if you ask any church officer, or anyone who eventually agreed to serve some capacity in the church the blessings they received from serving far exceeds the blessings they were able to give to others. That's what James tells us today and is reinforced again and again in our life experiences. Verse 25 tells us that those who are doers who act will be blessed in their doing. Deacons, can I get an Amen to that?

We are a church that is very good at doing in some very key areas of ministry. Before session decided to hire a full time youth director we made a concerted effort to listen and to be slow to speak and act. We were so pleased by how many of you came to our congregational reflection.

As a result the session voted unanimously to do it, but not until those steps were followed that James laid out. But what are some areas where maybe we are hearers and not necessarily doers? You have heard from this pulpit encouragement for hospitality. The fellowship committee is overseeing 5 events in less than a month. That's incredible. But what about our individually, are we reaching out to those who are visiting the church? I don't mean outreach committee, I mean each one reach one type stuff? How many of us have invited those who

attend that we don't know to our homes for a meal, or baked them cookies when they moved in on behalf of the church.

We are good at just doing it in visiting the sick, in supporting our youth, in taking care of our grounds, in our music and worship, in our outreach to the community. I pray that as we hear again these words from James that we will be encouraged by how we are able to put faith to action, but also challenged in those areas where we fall a bit short.