**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**August 29th, 2021**

**Doers of the Word**

1. A Gem in the Midst

The epistle of James is one that is rarely read or recognized in the Bible. There is some good cause for this – we can’t nail down who wrote the epistle exactly and we don’t really know who it is addressed to, except for assuming it is a Greek community referencing Jewish law. It’s an epistle of five chapters and how it even made it into the Scriptures is a fair question, but when we open it up, there are some important gems that continue to be referenced today.

The line that you might recognize from our Scripture today is, “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” That is one segment though of a much larger theme that runs throughout the book. The epistle is focused on who God is, what God does, and then how humans should reflect and imitate what God does.

In this particular part of the Epistle, James warns us that it is one thing to hear the Word and to think about it, but it means nothing and we deceive ourselves and others if we don’t actually live into what the Word is calling us to. That is where this sense of being ‘doers of the Word’ comes from – it’s as easy and as hard as that – you hear the Word, now do and act in the same manner.

1. Generosity

And to do the Word means to live generously, pointing to God as the one who teaches us how to be generous. Some of you may have noticed over the last five years that I’ve been pastor, I begin a lot of my prayers with ‘Generous God.’ That isn’t to negate the sense that God is also loving and faithful or any other wonderful descriptions of our God. Yet for me, I’ve been anchored in that sense that God’s generosity is one that has rescued me, overwhelmed me, and every time I say it, it is also a challenge to me. If God is generous and I am called to follow in God’s ways, then I need to be generous.

I’m not sure about you, but generosity is sometimes easy for me and sometimes very difficult. Generosity is a lifestyle – it means that we are to be generous not only with our time and talents and tithes, but it means we also are generous in the way we live in community and how we interact with one another. When it comes to time, talents, and tithes, these can be really tangible things – when we give our time to visit someone who is ailing, or we use our skills to fix a problem, or we offer a portion of our money to the service of the church or to a cause that we feel deeply tied to. All of these tangible things can be hard – the generosity here might mean that we need to delay our own wants or desires in order to be generous.

Have you ever noticed that it is often those who do not have much can be the most generous in this regard? When I consider generosity, I think back to one of my field education placements in Philadelphia where living was rough. In order to be the intern that year, I was given the code to an iron gate where I was to park my car in a very specific place and enter the church through a particular door. The area had so much crime and in some ways it felt foreign to me as I heard stories from congregants and the lead pastor of what would happen in the neighborhood.

Yet the people who entered that particular church on a Sunday morning were some of the most generous people in regard to time, talents, and tithes. I remember one Sunday morning where we were greeting the parishioners as they exited the door and one woman, who I knew was in dire straits, came up to me and opened my hand, put three dollars in my hand, and clasped her hand over mine. She told me to that this was to go to the church to serve the Lord.

I remember my automatic reaction, which was to say, “No, keep it.” I didn’t want to take her money, it felt wrong, it felt challenging, and yet it wasn’t my choice. Before I could even really express my feelings, she was already out the door and I looked down at the three dollars and put it in the offering plate. She taught me that generosity, in any form, isn’t contingent upon privilege or status. She heard the Word, she listened, and then she acted as such and became a doer of the Word.

You may say – it’s only three dollars, what will three dollars do? But we have to remember that it is in the smallest of acts, the little things, that build up community and our ability to serve God. The three dollars is not only cash, it is a sign of where she lays her priorities, and in that, may we also be guided by her generosity.

1. Other Generosity

I think of time, talents, and tithes in one category of being generous, but for me there’s also

this sense of having a generous spirit. I try to have a generous spirit, but I have to admit that I also sometimes find it difficult and sometimes I’m even spiteful that I need to have this spirit.

A tangible expression of this is when someone hurts my feelings. As tough as I like to be with my Jersian sensibilities, we’re all human and we all can and are hurt by words that are divisive or come from an anger that is not rooted in righteousness. Yet the generosity of God teaches us as James names to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Instead of retorting back with a harsh word, maybe my real purpose in those moments is to listen to why the person is angry or upset or being argumentative. Generosity is not about letting people walk all over you, but it is being generous in acknowledging that their particular response might not be about you. In being generous in seeking understanding, you are following the Word of God, and also reflecting and sharing how generosity can build bridges in relationship with one another.

This is true in our lives outside this sanctuary, but is also very relevant for inside these walls as well. As we are all believers, seeking to follow Christ in what we do and say, we are called to this generosity. The understanding that to be generous is to be in alignment with the nature of God, steers, orients, and lets us practice that generosity in real time. In this safe space, can we slow down, can we hear one another, can we speak in due time, and can we bridle our tongues when our words will not increase the development of community?

1. Final Thoughts

In this text, the theme of generosity is consistent, but James also warns us what life looks like

if we are not doers of the Word. He shares with us that those who hear the Word but do nothing are essentially lifeless – they look at themselves in the mirror but they do not know who they are – they stand for nothing and they are not grounded by God’s strength. If you hear the Word and do nothing, your religion is meaningless, because there is no significant expression of your faith externally.

James asks us to be generous, to care for the orphans, to show kindness to the widows, to be with those in distress. We are called to not only hear the Word but act upon it.

My questions for you this week are, as it often is, simply said but harder to live out. How will you be a doer of the Word? How will you seek to not only hear the Word spoken every week, but then to actually live it out and be the hands and feet of Jesus? How will the Word change you today?

May we ask these hard questions together and seek answers as look to be doers of the Word. Amen.