

**Sermon from James 1:17-27**  
**Year B/15<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost/9-5-21**

Please listen with me for a word from God for your life as I read the New Revised Standard Version of James 1:17-27, where we are encouraged by the writer to see true worship of God that is “pure and undefiled” (James 1:27).

*17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. 19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. 21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; 24 for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. 25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. 26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

This morning we will focus on the passage from James where the writer provides for us an apt follow-up to the readings from both the Old Testament **and** gospel. First, in Deuteronomy, we heard God speak through the prophet Moses, revealing to the people - they were not to add or take away **anything** from the commandments of God. Complete directives that gave life and blessing. We **know** this is what Jesus instructed, when as the Son of God, he taught that huge mass of humanity on the mountain, he did not come to change one letter of God's law but rather to fulfill it. God's perfect law that Jesus not only knew but that he lived. This is clearly demonstrated in Mark's gospel lesson this morning, as Jesus taught the religious leaders of his day, it is not what goes into the body that defiles, but rather what comes out. You see, the traditions the Pharisees and Scribes adhered to were added to control and discourage the fullness of life lived in community intended by God, and with Jesus' words, his teaching **countered** what

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the religious leaders endorsed as Jesus declared --- it is not the type of food you eat or whether you wash your hands that corrupts --- rather it is **heart-less-ness** toward any part of God's good creation that taint and debase you and me and that prevent us from spirit-filled and faithful worship of God.

In the closing lines of the text from James, the writer draws our attention to religion or worship that is --- "pure and undefiled before God, the Father?" (James 1:27) --- "to care for orphans and widows in their trouble and oppression, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

In this way, the writer of the epistle is encouraging us to not only hear the gospel message of Jesus but to lean into the word, to be still and discern the will of God, and in that --- to be doers and not simply listeners of the word, as we follow the way of Jesus, who is God's law and Word that came to **be** among us.

We too know God's command to love and serve the Lord with every aspect of life and being and then to love neighbor as self. However, if these are words that go into our ears and not into our heart --- if they do not result in our giving care and hospitality to those who are radically different from us, as well as family and friends who are closet to us --- **then**, we are not offering true worship to God.

I have a really great planning calendar that is published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). And as I was preparing for this morning, I noticed --- the season of Peace begins today --- 31 days where **we** as people of God are asked to focus on being **doers** of the word as we seek guidance from the Spirit of God to be people of peace. "Doers of the word." In the original Greek, there is something very interesting about the scope of intent for the word doer. It can mean being a performer of the enactment of a law as heard in the opening words for worship from Romans 2:13, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified." **Or** --- the word doers also convey with it the sense of one being a maker, or the author of a song, or a poet composing a poem. This can be found in Acts 17:28, when Paul taught the Athenians about the unity of humanity as he voiced, "For in [God] we live and move and have our being; as even some of our own poets have said, for we too are his offspring." And it is **not** either this definition or the other that take us to some understanding of "religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father" for indeed it is in both perceptions of the word "doer" where we encounter God in the living of the law that is

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Jesus, and in that meeting be reminded of the spark of the divine that dwells within each person -- a holy and creative ember with the capacity to bring peace into our homes **and** in our community.

In the vestibule of the church along with your bulletin and communion cup, hopefully each family picked up a package of cards to use during this Season of Peace. As we seek through the Holy Spirit to be “doers of the word, I encourage you to incorporate these cards for this season in your daily life as you and your family come to understand the fullness of peace.

**(To access these cards, please go to the [presbyterianmission.org](http://presbyterianmission.org) website and scroll down to Peace Cards – Third Edition)**

Each card in the pack includes has a question, an action, and a prayer, **and** as family, I’d like us to begin this morning by looking at the first card that asks: Where do you see peace in your world today? The action suggests making a peace garden with rocks. Color or paint rocks writing words or drawing pictures or using color to express hope, peace, and love. Create a little garden with the rocks, allow people to take a rock if they need it or add one if they have something positive to share. It’s as simple as that --- painted rocks that express hope, peace, and love.

Peace is an intangible commodity that is much needed in our society. I recently experienced the giving and receiving of peace in a convenience store when a lady who could not find cash or a card to pay for her purchase had created a rather long line. After she walked away the next person went to the counter and made his purchase. I was at least 5 people back in line and anxious to get back home. The lady who could not find her money finally found her credit card and walked back toward the cashier, and that was when it happened. The next person in line (who had been waiting longer than I had) graciously motioned for the woman to go in front of her. At that moment, peace that is love was given not only to the lady who could now complete her purchase; it was also given to me.

Our intentionally extending peace throughout the next 31 days is an indicator this community of faith is following an essential instruction from James, where we are advised, to be doers and not merely listeners of the word. Being people, who through the Holy Spirit, live out worship that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father --- by setting aside time each day to represent life in God that extends to family **and** community --- love and hope and peace --- giving to God all glory this day and every day.

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Let us pray. Creator God, remind us of the sacred fire that burns within each of us. Guide us to glow with much needed peace in our corner of your creation --- giving love and hope that unify **all** who are part of our family --- especially those in our community who are unloved and hopeless. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.