

Our second reading is going to be from the New Testament letter of James. Tradition has said that this letter was written by James the brother of Jesus. James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus. Some believe that part of this letter was written by James and then added onto by others after his death. Historians tell us that James was martyred for his beliefs about Jesus.

The book of James has been a controversial book. The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther said that the book of James was an “epistle of straw.” Martin Luther did not like how James emphasizes that servants of God are to not only listen but to put their words into action. Many believe that James was written to contrast with what Paul said about grace and faith.

The book of James is not the easiest book to read because it hops around a lot. James puts together lots of random thoughts. There is a lot in James and there are lots of different directions that one can go when trying to understand what he is saying to us today.

James was written to a group of Jewish Christians who were struggling with what it meant to follow the Jewish laws and their Christian faith. These Jewish Christians were a minority where they lived and they were being greatly persecuted for their faith. But James writes these words to these Jewish Christians who were part of the Dispersion or Diaspora. The Diaspora were Jews that were living outside of Jerusalem.

Read James 1:17-26

My hunch is that you have probably already looked at a mirror this morning. Maybe you awake and looked to the mirror to critique how bad you look from the night before. You roll out of bed and into the bathroom and then glance at a mirror to see what has changed since the night before. What pimple has shown up or wrinkle on your face.

Maybe you found yourself in front of a mirror after a shower and the mirror became a place to bring new life and adornment to your body. Combing your hair or putting on make-up. A mirror can be a place to lead you into hope for the new day.

Mirrors can also be places of discovery. Maybe you have found yourself in front of a mirror to try out some new hairdo or maybe some new piece of clothing. It is in front of a mirror that you check out to see if the new shirt you bought looks good on you. Or maybe it is in front of a mirror that you check out your new biceps. You can work out in a gym with lots of mirrors and you can keep looking at yourself to see how well you are progressing in developing new muscles. Some of us have more to show off than others.

Maybe one of your favorite places to visit at a fair is the house of mirrors. The different mirrors distort your body shape bringing you laughter as a child or maybe even as an adult.

Maybe a mirror has been a place which has not be always easy to look into. You maybe had that radiation treatment and a mirror was a place where you went to see which new hairs had fallen out of your head. Maybe it was in looking at a mirror that you discovered that nodule that turned out to be breast cancer.

Or maybe you have struggled with weight gain and the mirror has been a place that you have used to beat yourself up because you think you look bigger than you did yesterday.

Mirrors have certainly had a central place in some of our literature. One thinks of the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. In this story, Snow White's evil Queen step-mother looks daily at a mirror and is told that she is the fairest of them all. But then one day the mirror informs the Queen that Snow White is the fairest and so the queen sets out to have Snow White killed.

Or maybe we know the story of Narcissus. In this mythological story, a woman named Echo falls in love with Narcissus. Narcissus rejects Echo. The goddess Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, then decides to punish Narcissus for rejecting Echo. Narcissus then comes upon a pool of water and looks at his reflection in this mirror of water. Narcissus falls in love with his reflection and is so saddened that he can never have his desire he ends up taking his own life.

Mirrors seem to play a pretty big role in our culture. If you have a favorite hair stylist or barber you know that in front of that mirror while you have gotten your hair cut you have also received important snippets of wisdom. It might be the latest sports information from your barber or it might be words to lift your spirits from your stylist.

Mirrors also play a big role in this Scripture that we read. James says that anyone who listens to the Word of God but does not put their faith into action is like a person who looks into a mirror and then forgets what they look like. (Repeat) According to the King James Version of the Bible, “Be Ye Doers of the Word and Not Only Hearers.”

But then James lays out what it means to be doers of the Word. And this is the way that James defines what it means to be a doer of the word. James says putting your faith into action means to do three things.

- 1) Speak honestly
- 2) Care for the widows and orphans
- 3) Keep yourself unstained by the world.

So now when we look into a mirror we have three things that our mirror can remind ourselves. Our mirrors can be places which remind us of what we are called to be as Christians. When we look in our mirrors we are not looking at them to be vain.

Instead, we look into mirrors to remind us of what it means to be a Christian. And according to James, following Jesus means to speak honestly, care for widows and orphans, and keep oneself unstained by the world.

As I read James' words about caring for widows and orphans I cannot help but think about the plight of refugees and immigrants around the world. We hear a lot from our own politicians about these subjects. We hear a lot about the refugee crises in Europe as families flee the fighting in Syria and Lebanon.

We hear a lot about immigrants who are seeking to move to the United States from Central America and Mexico. We here at Allison Creek have at least two families who have just been certified to become foster families.

There are lots of things said now about undocumented immigrants in our country and about refugees in Europe. I don't know what the best solution is to these challenges. But I do know what James says. If we want to be a follower of Jesus Christ then we have to speak the truth, we have to care for widows and orphans, and we have to not be tainted by the world around us.

When we have national discussions about issues like immigration and the needs for local children who are in abusive situations, it is easy to join in with the culture and treat people as less than we are. But when we are tempted to add to the conversation and speak harshly of others I invite us to look into the mirror and be reminded that we are called to care for the widow and the orphan.

So we are not just called to show up in worship on a Sunday morning to worship God. We are called to pay attention to the needs around us. To pay attention to the person who may be alone now after the death of a spouse. To pay attention to the child that may be left alone.

To pay attention to the person that is cast aside. After noticing the needs around us, we are called to put our faith into action and do something about it.

Tonight and tomorrow you will look at yourself in a mirror. James invites you to look past your own looks. Look into the mirror and ask God to show you the widows and orphans in our society and others that are in need.

And then pray for God to help you to not just be a listener but to be a doer of the word. AMEN.

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