Today we continue to read through the letter written by James. The letter writer James is believed to be the brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church. He writes this letter to some churches who were struggling. These churches are dealing with issues that are threatening to tear their faith communities apart. James is writing to them toward the end of the first century to guide them to live a life differently than the culture around them.

Last week we read the first chapter in which James challenged his hearers to not just listen to the word but to be doers of the word. We lifted up some different examples of Christians who were putting their faith into action and not just being merely Sunday morning pew sitters. Their actions challenged us and our actions.

When you read one half of a correspondence between two people or two groups of people, you have to figure out what must be happening that is causing the writer to write what he/she writes. Let us read James 2: 1-13 and see if we can figure out what is happening in the churches that James is writing to.

**Read James 2:1-13**

Obviously these Christians that James is writing to are playing favorites in their church. The ones with money and power and influence were being treated much better than those who were poor and without power and influence. These Christians were gathering together in worship and meals and some were being left out.

For this community that James is writing to, the ones being left out were the poor while the ones with wealth were being included and being given special places of honor.

There is a phrase in the gospel of Matthew about where two or more are gathered then Christ will be present. I wonder after reading James if James would say where two or more are gathered then there is probably a third person who would like to be included somehow but is being left out. Because chances are pretty good that when more than two gather it won’t take long before they identify someone that they want to keep out.

After watching portions of two political conventions over these past two weeks, I was struck by how much effort was put forth by both political parties to make themselves appear welcoming of all. But as much as they tried to make themselves appear welcoming of all, they were not. Ron Paul supporters at the Republican convention were put in the balcony while I don’t recall hearing any pro-life speakers at the Democratic convention. When more than two gather it is a pretty good bet that someone is not going to be welcomed in.

James writes a letter to a Christian community that was being very worldly when they were gathering together. The wealthy were getting the best seats and being treated well while the poor were being left to fend for themselves. But James says that is not right. According to James, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. James continues by saying that if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as a transgressor.

We live in a world that encourages us to show partiality. And I am afraid that this election season that we in the Christian church are already being negatively influenced by our culture. A culture that says to divide ourselves up, choose sides, don’t listen to the other side, use nasty names to describe the other, and win at all costs. A culture that says it is ok to tell half-truths because the ends justifies the means.

I don’t like the sense of what I see happening in our country as we head into this election season. And I have a fear that our culture is pushing Christians like us apart and we are choosing sides in a destructive manner even though we share a common faith. We are being influenced by half-truths and fear mongering and we think nothing of it. Our culture is encouraging us to show partiality and we are going along with what our culture is telling us to do.

We each get into our little communities of like minded people who reinforce what we already believe and then we say nasty things on Facebook or in conversations at work or in our home about people who are on the other side. We show partiality toward people we think are like us and we are harsh toward those who are not.

James is writing to a church that is showing partiality to the wealthy and treated the poor as less than the wealthy. That makes good sense though doesn’t it? The wealthy after all are the ones who have the resources to fund the church programs. The wealthy are going to fund the church salaries. The wealthy make the church look good.

But James scolds the congregation that he is writing to. He tells them that they have it all wrong. James tells them that they are not to treat the wealthy any differently that they treat the poorest among them. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do not show partiality.

What would it look like if we in the Christian church were different than our neighbors? What if we decided that James was an important book of the Bible and that we should try to live into the vision that James offers? That is an important question for us. It may cause us to change our behavior.

It would mean that the person in church who has a lot of material possessions will seek out the person who has little material possessions and say, “I am yearning to grow in my faith and I want us to learn together.” Not in a condescending way but with an openness that says both the rich and poor have something to teach one another about the love of God.

If we in the Christian Church adopted the writings of James and tried to live into them, it would mean that the person who listens to country music, loves Nascar, and watches Fox News would seek out the person who listens to James Taylor, who doesn’t hunt, and who listens to NPR and they would form a prayer partnership with one another and maybe organize a forum about how to be a Christian citizen during an election season.

In our society we are encouraged to show partiality. Where two or more are gathered we are encouraged to try to leave someone else out. But that is not the way James says we are to act. According to James, we are not to show partiality.

As part of this Scripture this morning, I invite you to think of someone whom you would describe as the other in your life? Who in your life do you think to yourself, I do not want that kind of person in my church? Visualize that person. Visualize the person that you see as the other in your life that makes you uncomfortable for some reason or that you don’t understand.

Now imagine that you open your eyes and that person is sitting next to you. What are you feeling? What do you want to do? What do you really want to say?

Now think about James from the Bible. As you sit next to this person that makes you uncomfortable for whatever reason, hear his words being addressed to you. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If you show partiality, you commit sin and stand convicted.”

Are we going to act like the way our society tells us to act and show partiality to certain people and demonize people that we don’t understand? Or are we going to act in a different way than that and treat others equally? AMEN.

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