

We have been reading through the New Testament letter of James over the past few weeks and today we move into the 4th chapter. We have been learning that James was written to a group of Jewish Christians that were facing lots of persecution. They were living outside of Jerusalem and were trying to understand what it meant to be Christian but also to maintain their Jewish lifestyle.

We are going to read all 17 verses of chapter 4 but focus in on the last 5 verses.

Read James 4

James says you do not know what tomorrow will bring. You can make all the plans in the world but you do not know what tomorrow will bring. You can be the most planned person in the world who thinks through every possible event that may happen to spoil your plans but, as James says, you do not know what tomorrow will bring. You can have the best calendar with plans made out for the next year but, like James says, you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Now I am not the most planned person in the world. Anyone who knows me knows that I can shift pretty rapidly and be willing to change my plans pretty quickly. That has gotten me in trouble at times as I have been accused at times of being too quick to change direction. Others of us are very planned people.

I married someone who works very hard to think out plans very logically and if we would all just stick to the plan than life would go smoother. But even the most planned person comes to a point when they should realize, like James says, you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Yesterday I went down to the Lower Richland community outside of Columbia. I was with people who know better than anyone that you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

I want to share a little bit about what I know about Lower Richland and then show some pictures and then offer some ways that we can respond. As you look at these pictures I invite you to hear again the words of James that you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Lower Richland is an area of Richland County located between Columbia and Sumter. It is about a 1 ½ hour drive from here. I know about Lower Richland very well because I grew up in Lower Richland. I am a graduate of Lower Richland High School.

Facebook can be a marvelous tool during times of crisis. After reading an article about the devastation in Lower Richland, I used Facebook to begin to try to connect with residents of Lower Richland. Within a few hours of my posting on Facebook I was in contact with several people who lived in the community. I was able to have a phone conversation with the chair of the Richland District One School Board who lives in the community. In a relatively short period of time I was able to learn a great deal about what was happening.

Lower Richland High School is now a shelter and distribution center for donated items. I want to now show some pictures so that you get a sense of what is going on at the high school and in the community. As I walk us through these pictures I invite you to remember the words from James about how you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

This Lower Richland community had no idea a couple of weeks ago that their lives would change so drastically. If the storm that blew through their area had come inland some 40 miles or so north then the devastated community would be our community.

Show pictures from the Lower Richland community

Repeating the words from James, “we do not know what tomorrow will bring.”

But then James offers some further words for us. James then asks the question, “What is your life?” In other words, “what is the meaning of life?” James says we are but a mist that appears for a little while and then we vanish. That may not be very comforting. But James then says that since our lives are so short we must use them in the best way possible.

Our lives, according to James, are not to be spent bragging about what we have accomplished. Eventually our accomplishments will be in the memories of others like the mist that vanishes. One day no one will remember what we have accomplished. But, instead, James says to figure out the right thing to do and just do it.

What I love about this congregation is that you have responded over and over again to needs around you. Just a few couple of weeks ago we posted a couple of videos on the church website that were made 10 years ago. Videos that document the trips we sent to Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

Do you know how monumental that was? Do you realize how monumental it was that this church organized several trips that took about 10 hours of travel one way to help the people of Mississippi? Do you realize how monumental it was that we organized several people in our community to get invested in the lives of people in Pass Christian and Long Beach, Mississippi?

While other church people and community members talked about going to Mississippi you did it. You sent people and supplies and money. It was a team effort with lots of people involved. And now, I offer, we are called by God to respond to neighbors once again. I suggest that we are being called to heavily invest in Lower Richland for 2 reasons.

The first reason is the reason that James sites. Helping your neighbor when they are struggling is the right thing to do. We all know that. It is just that sometimes we get so busy with our own lives that we overlook the needs around us. But Scriptures like the words of James are very clear. We are called to do the right thing and that is to help out our neighbor in need.

The second reason is that this church community needs to do this for our own growth and witness. I can't tell you how many people I know who are unchurched who want to be involved in these types of ministry efforts. Our outreach into Lower Richland can make a huge impact in our efforts to connect people to God through this congregation. Our mission outreach can be our most effective evangelism.

I offer the work across the street as proof as a small sample of how we are called to do outreach. A lot of the work across the street and including that beautiful steeple that now sits on top of that prayer chapel and those benches that were put out there this week were built by people who are not a part of a church community.

The leader of the project that is now a member of this church was not involved in any church for a lot of years before this project began. It is not coincidental that the people that I am talking about are all men. Being involved in leading ministry outreach and helping others is a very effective way of connecting people to the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Ed Veasey has volunteered to be our coordinator of our involvement in the Lower Richland community. There are lots of places that we can become involved. But maybe it is selfish on my part but I feel that since we have a natural connection to Lower Richland that this is a region of the state where we are called to go.

I invite you to prayerfully consider how God may be calling you to be a part of our efforts to become involved in assisting the residents of Lower Richland. This will not be a short term project. The needs are great and will be that way for a long time. But I think we learned a lot from 10 years ago that we can apply into our work today.

None of us knows what tomorrow will bring. But if we trust in God and are willing to follow God's path, then we can be assured that tomorrow will be a beautiful day no matter whether it is rainy or sunny. AMEN.

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-Given: October 11, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)