

We continue our reading through the New Testament letter of James today. The letter is attributed to James, the brother of Jesus who was an early leader in the Christian church. Many scholars today think that this letter was completed by a second person who picked up the original work and then completed it to send it to churches in conflict at the end of the first century.

Today we are reading from the end of the 3rd chapter and into the middle of the 4th chapter.

Read James 3:13-4:12

For the past two weeks the eyes of the country have been on Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh as they testified before a Congressional Committee. The country listened as they shared their accounts of what happened 35 years ago, when she said he sexually assaulted her at a house party, and he said neither the party nor the assault occurred.

But while viewers may have watched the same hearing, they did not interpret it through the same lens. Whether you followed along on a television channel or followed along with news updates, your experience was shaped by the filters you chose to place alongside this event.

Some interpreted these testimonies and concluded there was science-backed credibility while others saw a circus. These divergent interpretations are all too typical in this period of political polarization leaving us wondering if others saw the same event that we witnessed.

For some of us, you chose news filters after her testimony that shared with you images of women talking about how Dr. Blasey Ford's testimony moved them to tears. Or maybe you saw or heard about how her scientific background was a particular asset to her testimony.

You may have heard or read that the Republicans' prosecutor, Rachel Mitchell, is known for her evenhanded treatment of sex crimes cases and that the—all-white-male—Republican side's reliance on an outside investigator reflects poorly on them. You heard that one-time Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum said that Dr. Blasey Ford is “not lying.”

For others of us, after his testimony you chose news filters that celebrated how “Kavanaugh Clears His Name.” You watched and listened as South Carolina Senator Lindsay Graham was celebrated for “tearing into” Democrats while Trump “blasted” them. Kavanaugh appeared far more sympathetic in this coverage that highlighted his testimony about his young daughter praying for Dr. Blasey Ford.

Through both filters each side casts the other as inappropriate and celebrates their own viewpoint. And as these narratives grow, change, and refract their way across the internet and in conversations in the barber shop and in book clubs or at work, the gap between them is likely to widen.

Partisan narratives overcome attempted objectivity. It's hard to imagine a scenario where that's less appropriate than when trying to determine whether a man or woman is telling the truth about a sexual assault.

Choosing filters to interpret events in a way that reaffirms your beliefs is the way of the world. But in contrast to this worldly approach, let's listen to what James has to say.

James asks who is wise and understanding among you? James says that envy and selfish ambition come from the world. He describes envy and selfish ambition as being earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. The author Frederick Buechner defines envy as the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.

James contrasts these earthly traits with Godly traits like being peaceable, gentle, willing to compromise, showing no partiality or hypocrisy. James says that the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

James asks where conflicts come from? James says conflicts come about when we crave things that we cannot attain. He calls his listeners adulterers for caring more about worldly ways than Godly ways.

James then says to submit instead to God. Lament your wrongdoing. Don't speak evil against others or judge another. There is but one lawgiver.

It saddens me that we are allowing ourselves to be drug down into the evil of partisanship. We get stirred up by people who promote our beliefs and encourage us to call others evil, idiots, close-minded, and far, far worse. We see ourselves as pure and the other as evil.

But when we Christians act that way we have become the adulterers who trust in an affair with the world over a true relationship with God. Instead of following these worldly and destructive ways, we are called by James into two responses.

James says we are to be non-violent and James says we are called to be respectful. We don't have to like or agree with someone else to treat them with respect. And when someone disrespects those that disagree with them they are having an affair with the devil according to James.

Today is Worldwide Communion Sunday. This is a day when people all over the world are invited forward to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. That includes Senators and Representatives, Sexual Abuse Survivors and perpetrators, Republicans and Democrats, Legal citizens and Undocumented immigrants. All of us are invited to the table.

As we approach the table today we are invited to reflect on an important question. Who do we want to have our deepest most intimate relationship with?

Do we want to follow closest the ways of the world which includes envy, deceit, destruction, selfish ambition, and hypocrisy?

Or do we want to follow the Godly ways of gentleness, kindness, and peacemaking? Do you want to show non-violence with our words and actions and do you want to show respect to others that disagree with you?

As we make our decision remember that we come to a table where Jesus died for every one of us and every one of them. AMEN.

+++++

-Buechner, Frederick, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, Harper/San Francisco, 1973, p. 20

-Ellis, Emma Grey, <https://www.wired.com/story/blasey-ford-kavanaugh-filter-bubbles> (I adapted my opening from her words in this article)

-Given: October 7, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)