We are going to continue reading from James 4. We have been reading through this letter through the month of September. James is a letter written by a person who is believed to be the brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church. In the previous weeks we have discovered James writing words to a collection of churches about how they are to be doers of the word and not just talk about it. We have heard that there are conflicts in the churches and James gives advice about how to deal with that. We have heard him talk about how words can build up and how words can tear down Christian communities.

We do not hear from James the brother of Jesus anything about what kind of wife Jesus had so that may be a big disappointment for some folks this week. If you don’t know, there has been a big story this week in which an ancient fragment was found which quotes Jesus beginning a sentence with the words “my wife…” Not going there today. Plenty of jokes have come to my head that would get me in trouble. But I am going to read from James 4. Let us now listen to what he says in our reading today.

**Read James 4**

The other day I was listening to Garth Brooks. OK, I have never before in my life listened to Garth Brooks. But, you know, life is about exploring new things and new possibilities and listening to music that you have never listened to before and if you are not willing to try new things and explore new things then you are missing out on so much that life has to offer.

Well, anyway, I was listening to the Garth Brooks song called “Unanswered Prayers.” Let me sing to you the lyrics. Ok, maybe you don’t want me to do that. Instead, I invite you to listen to Garth Brooks as he sings this song.

Just the other night at a hometown football game  
My wife and I ran into my old high school flame  
And as I introduced them the past came back to me  
And I couldn't help but think of the way things used to be  
  
She was the one that I'd wanted for all times  
And each night I'd spend prayin' that God would make her mine  
And if he'd only grant me this wish I wished back then  
I'd never ask for anything again  
  
[Chorus]  
Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers  
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs  
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care  
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers  
  
She wasn't quite the angel that I remembered in my dreams  
And I could tell that time had changed me  
In her eyes too it seemed  
We tried to talk about the old days  
There wasn't much we could recall  
I guess the Lord knows what he's doin' after all  
  
And as she walked away and I looked at my wife  
And then and there I thanked the good Lord  
For the gifts in my life  
  
[Chorus]  
  
Some of God's greatest gifts are all too often unanswered...  
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers

How many of us have a plan of what we want our life to look like in a year, or 5 years, or 10 years? I once heard John Cloninger, one of our blessed members who lives in a retirement community now say he used to make 10 year plans but as he got older his 10 year plans became 1-2 year old plans.

Most of us do make plans for the future. Newly married couples talk about if and when they want to have children. Those of us who are parents watch our children as they are born and as they grow and we think to ourself we need to start saving for college now and so we set up a fund if we are smart. Those of us who are students start paying attention to the classes that interest us and we may start to explore what careers may be open to us.

Those of us who are employed come up with plans of what we want our careers to look like in a year or 5 years and sometimes we set up strategic plans to get from here to there. Some of us who are toward the end of our careers start to look toward retirement and think about making plans to have an income in retirement that allows us to do some of the things that we want to do in our retirement.

Those are all good things, of course. They make great sense. It makes great sense to come up with a 1 year plan or a 5 year plan. It makes great sense to create a vision for your future and how to get from where you are to where you want to go.

But for those of us who have a plan for what our life looks like a year from now or 5 years from now, I invite you to hear these words from James again.

**Read James 4:13-15**

Even the best and smartest plans that we make for our lives may not come to fruition. We may have the best plans and take into account every variable that we can imagine. But the reality is we don’t know what tomorrow brings. We don’t know what we will be doing 6 months from now or a year from now or 5 years from now.

I was reminded of this again on Friday. Plans were made for 8 RVs to be here with 16 people. But two couples could not come at the last minute due to medical issues. We do not know what tomorrow brings.

How many students have looked forward to being in a school play or on a sports team but then told by the coach or instructor that they were cut? How many people have invested their savings through a close friend that promised them great returns on their investments for their retirement only to find out that they were the victims of a ponzi scheme and their money was all gone?

How many people worked hard for a company for 20 plus years and then got called into their bosses office and told that the company was losing money and they were going to have to lay people off and that they were now unemployed.

How many spouses said goodbye to their loved ones in a very nonchalant manner in New York City on September 10, 2001 as they headed off to work in the World Trade Center? How many of them had plans for the weekend? How many expectant parents just finished painting the nursery when they went to the doctor for the final ultrasound and were told by the doctor that she could not find a heartbeat?

Some of us have great 1 year plans and 5 year plans and 10 year plans. And sometimes our plans happen the way we expect them to happen. And we get lulled into a false sense of security that we are really smart or that we are in control. But as James reminds us, we don’t know what tomorrow will bring.

James says that they way we should approach our plans for tomorrow is like this. We should say, “**If the Lord wishes**, we will live and do this or that.”

Sometimes our prayers and our plans for tomorrow do go unanswered. Sometimes our careers don’t go the way we want them to go. Sometimes people we love get cancer and our life priorities are flipped. Sometimes we don’t make the team or get the part we want. Sometimes people we love have tragic events happen to them. Sometimes we get fired and sometimes our businesses fail and sometimes we have to downsize. We don’t know what tomorrow brings.

But the advice we receive from James is that as we face tomorrow, we are to remain humble. We do not control our destiny. There are things outside of our control. And James would say that rather than working harder to control our destiny we need to be humble and trust in a power that is greater than our power and control. Tomorrow is not about us and our plans. Tomorrow is about God and God’s plans.

Some in our society would argue that we live in a closed system with limited resources and that we need to compete with others to get these finite resources. That if we don’t get that job, or achieve that goal, or marry that person then we have missed out on a chance which will never have happen again.

But I think James would argue something else. I think James would say that we live in an open world where God provides unlimited resources. Some things fade away today but God is in the business of creating new possibilities tomorrow.

Maybe Garth Brooks is a wise theologian.

Maybe indeed it is best if some prayers and some long range plans go unanswered. AMEN.

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