

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Easter People are Made Whole

Epistle Lesson

James 1:19-27 (NRSVUE)

¹⁹You must understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, ²⁰for human anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

²²But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

²⁶If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Bible/Sermon Focus

Christ is Risen indeed! We made it! We are in the season of Easter! The resurrection has taken place. As the body of Christ is breathing again, so are we. So now what? What do we do with the resurrection energy of Easter morning? What is our response?

This is our first week of a new sermon Series called, *Easter People, Let Us Sing!* In this series we will ask, what does it mean to be "Easter People?" How do Easter people live out our faith in the risen Christ, in community together? We will think about what it means for Easter people to be "doers of the word" and not merely hearers. We will do this by exploring together the theological themes of the book of James.

The book of James seems to be a collection of essays on various particular topics, under the general theme of how to bring faith to life in the chosen community, in the church. James uses terms like "beloveds" and "brothers and sisters" to address his audience, the diaspora of the twelve tribes (the people of the way of Christ scattered across the lands). His language is one of community and chosen family. And the response that James offers us to the resurrection has to do with how we are members of that community, how we live into our calling and our care for one another. Christ is Risen, and our response should be mutual care for one another. Showing up for one another. Doing life together.

James uses a metaphor in verses 23 and 24, "For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like." I love this metaphor and it resonates deeply in my soul. I have often said that I only remember who I am because others remind me. There are deep truths I know of my own value and of God's love for us and how we are called

to be in relationship with ourselves, one another, and creation. But it's easy for the voices of this world to drown out that inner voice. When we come to church and we show up for each other and we listen to one another, we find ourselves remembering who we really are. It's easy to forget, as James's metaphor so aptly expresses.

Beloveds we are called to *be* community and to *build* community. Our response to resurrection is not to run off and hide somewhere. We are called to extend the invitation to all. To witness to Christ in each other's faces, lest I forget what my own face looks like. And when I do forget, I can trust that others will remind me. And when we do this church thing, when we build and belong to community, we then witness the sanctification that takes place.

Sanctification is a cooperative aspect of salvation where God's grace makes us better. In sanctification we sin less and become more whole. Beloveds, we are completed by sharing with and receiving from others.

Building an active community of mutual love and care is how we are made whole.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to you to "be made whole?"
2. Name a time when you have forgotten who you are. Who helped remind you?
3. Reflect on this quote from Luke Timothy Johnson "For James, 'the faith of Jesus' means living before God in a manner shaped by the words of Jesus, and above all by his declaration that loving the neighbor as oneself is the 'royal law.'"
4. How does being part of this community impact your personal sanctification? Where do you see us experiencing communal sanctification? Where do you see our actions cooperate with God's grace?

Prayer

Resurrected God, we thank you for binding us together in your body, and for sharing with us your resurrection. Guide this energy to your will in the church and the world. Help us to transform church and community, guided by your grace. Sanctify us. Make us whole. Teach us what community looks like. **Amen.**

"I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power." - John Wesley