

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *The Vulnerability of Easter People*

## Epistle Lesson

James 4:11-17 (NRSVUE)

<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another speaks evil against the law and judges the law, but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it commits sin.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in a sermon Series called, *Easter People, Let Us Sing!* In this series we are asking, what does it mean to be "Easter People?" How do Easter people live out our faith in the risen Christ, in community together? How do we as Easter people to be "doers of the word" and not merely hearers. We are doing this by exploring together the theological themes of the book of James. Today we are looking at chapter 4. In order to talk about people being "doers of the word" we have to talk about right action. Christian ethics, or moral theology is the area of study that address this issue.

The beginning of this chapter makes a bold claim that conflicts and disputes among the community come from a place of conflict within us as individuals, it says, "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?" By verses 11-12, James reminds us that we are not to judge others. That the royal law of loving neighbor is corrupted by our judgement, and our judgement corrupts the law itself. Our conflicts among us...start within us.

When we fail to love ourselves, we fail to love our neighbor, and we fail to love God and the relational ties that the royal law upholds. We are not only not following the rules when we speak against each other, we are also breaking the rules by not living in a virtuous way of actually caring for one another enough to not judge.

On a TV show called the Good Place, the main character Eleanor Shellstrop finds herself in a place where she has wronged members of her community. She has judged them, lied to them, and her actions hurt people. Because of this her "point total," a system that keeps track of how good or bad people are, has plummeted into the negatives. She decides that she is going to try to raise her point total. She begins to make amends and things seem like their getting better but her point total doesn't budge. She has a realization.

"There's no way to increase my point total because everything I'm doing is out of self-preservation. My motivation is corrupt. Even when I do nice things, I'm only doing them so I can get something out of it...which means none of this had any real moral value. It doesn't count."

The thing about vulnerability and our ability to love others and ourselves in their/our authentic selves, is that even right action is not enough. You have to mean it. If our hearts are overtaken with judgement we have to deal with that. We want right action, but we also need right motivation.

If we are going to church, or to work, and we are motivated only by our own self-preservation, we will never know the Kin-dom of God. If our motivation is selfish, then the war within us as individuals and as a community will remain.

By verse 13 James has moved on from the topic of judging one another to the topic of judging what tomorrow may bring! It is almost as if James is nudging us toward a life free of judgment completely. Not only should we not judge one another, we should be walking into each new day listening for what God is calling us to do. To put aside our anxiety and to trust God, is what James is saying will make us Easter People!

## Discussion Questions

1. When has your motivation been "corrupt?"
2. Describe what healthy vulnerability looks like to you.
3. Have you ever maintained relationships at church for self-preservation? What was that like?
4. How easily do you face the day openly and without judgement?
5. Why is it so hard to listen to more than the judgmental voices in our head?

## Prayer

God of Easter Resurrection, breathe new hope and life into our community. Help us to face each day as another chance to experience your love and grace in all whom we encounter. Help us to put aside unnecessary worry about what tomorrow will bring, and root us in love for you and for our community. **Amen.**

*"Here's an idea. What if we don't worry about whatever comes next?" – Chidi Anagonye*