

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Always Easter People

Epistle Lesson

James 5:1-11 (NRSVUE)

¹ Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. ² Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure during the last days. ⁴ Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the outcome that the Lord brought about, for the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Bible/Sermon Focus

This is our final week of the series, "Easter People, Let us Sing!" This series has covered the book of James. It is amazing that so much can fit into five, short chapters. The title of this last sermon is, "Always Easter People."

Always is a long time. *Always*, as a concept, is not easily maintained by any human. In our lives, when are we *always* something, besides *always* changing? And yet James presents us with a very dichotomous thinking. We are either of the world or we are of the Kingdom of God. In terms of moral theology (or what is also known as Christian ethics) James is presenting here what we call a **separatist** ethic. In this view, that which is of the world is not of God. But that's really hard to think about, which is one of the reasons so many Christians hold a Christian ethic more rooted in **realist** moral theology, one that can hold the tension of how difficult it is to keep the world and the Kingdom of God separate.

And yet, we all understand the idealism. As pastor Andy mentioned, we want to hold the resurrection energy of Easter as high as we can, all of the time. We want it **separate**, to remain untouched, from our day to day living. But **realistically**, batteries lose power slowly and there has to be a space to recharge.

We want to live our lives on the mountaintop, in love with God, and witnessing to the miraculous work of resurrection and ascension. As Oswald Chambers says, "*The true test of our spiritual life is in exhibiting the power to descend from the mountain... We are not made for the mountains, for sunrises, or for the other beautiful attractions in life - those are simply intended to be moments of inspiration. We are made for the valley and the ordinary things of life, and*

that is where we have to prove our stamina and strength."

Beloved community, if we only remain Easter People when it's easy, than are we really practicing our faith? I think this is why James gets so prophetic in his writing. I also think this is why he quotes Jesus so often. Because it's easy to forget what it means to be Easter people, and it's easy to back slide into habits of this world that do not serve God.

James points out that one of the ways that we back slide is on our financial discipleship. Do you know that usually half of the people who attend church never even practice financial discipleship? That's a figure from across our nation. What does it say about what we really think about the Kingdom of God versus the world? Are we an Easter people? And if not, why? We practice the giving of our prayers, our presence, our service and our witness, but we try to put our "gifts" into one of those other categories. There are so many times where we hear folk say, "I volunteer, that's like giving money." Except it's not. That's giving of our presence. James's prophetic voice condemns the rich for living in "luxury and pleasure."

In a time when we are supposed to be building, preparing, working with patience like a farmer waiting for the harvest of the crops, all we are doing is acquiring. We are called to use all the things we experience (like our mountaintop moments) and all the things we have (like our material wealth), and share them with others. We don't hoard our miraculous, spiritual experiences, our resurrection energy, just for ourselves. We walk down the mountain and get back to work. When we find ourselves with money, we don't store it away, we give it to the Kingdom.

Whatever God has blessed us with, we use to bless others. *Always*. Yes, *always*. *Always* is a lot. *Always* is difficult. So, also, *always* there is grace.

Discussion Questions

1. Of all the things God has given you, what is easy for you to share? What is difficult for you to share?
2. How is the church, different than the world?
3. How does James remind you of the teachings of Jesus? The writing of the prophets? The wisdom writings?
4. Reflect on this quote from Rev. Dr. L. William Countryman, "*The **severing** of faith as belief in certain doctrines, from faith as a way of life, lived in in reliance on the generosity of God and endeavoring to share that generosity with others ... has no place in James' thinking.*"
5. What makes you generous?

Prayer

God of Always, You give with such abundance, and we are grateful. Show us how to always use what you have given, our experiences, our possessions, our material wealth, for your sake and for the sake of building your Reign on Earth. **Amen.**

"The true test of our spiritual life is in exhibiting the power to descend from the mountain."— Oswald Chambers