

I'm going to begin this morning by asking a question – and I will not ask anyone to put up their hand in response. The question is: "How many people who are here this morning have read the Letter of James in the past year?"

Each three years the Lectionary brings a series of readings from James – an example of Christian wisdom literature. Wisdom, in this regard does not refer to intellectual prowess. It is more like instruction on the integration of faith into conduct.¹

Is there anyone who would like to volunteer a guess on how much time it would take to read The Letter of James? In one of my Bibles it is four pages, in another – with larger print – it is six pages. Any estimates?

I've read this letter twice in the past week and it takes me about 10 minutes. However, there is the possibility that I read more quickly than others, so let's say that it may take 15 minutes to read what I like to think of as The Gospel of James. I call it the Gospel of James because DOING my faith brings heart-felt satisfaction to me! James brings me GOOD NEWS.

10, 080 – that's the number of minutes in a week – 60 minutes in an hour, X 24 hours a day, X 7 days.

I know that most of us have busy lives, and it is difficult to fit one more activity. I'd like to invite everyone to read The Letter of James this week as I'll be preaching on this again next Sunday.

Can you find 15 minutes in 10, 080?

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The Letter of James is more like a sermon, than a personal letter. For example, the letter contains these words that we heard Wendy read:

"Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."²

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."³

Another version re-phrases that last sentence in contemporary language by writing:

"Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world."⁴

² James 1:22

³ James 1:27 (NRSV)

⁴ James 1:27 (The Message – E. Peterson)

¹ Seasons of the Spirit, 2009, p. 102

When I read these words in the Letter of James, I hear a message about:

- the purpose of the Christian church;
- the MISSION of congregations of Christians, and
- the vocation that each of us has as a person of Christian faith.

David Bosch, a well-known author on the topic of Christian mission, has these words for us in his book, Transforming Mission:

“Within this unjust world, we are called to be a community of those committed to the values of God’s reign, concern ourselves with the victims of society and proclaim God’s judgment on those who continue to worship the gods of power and self-love.”⁵

“Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.”⁶

At a later point in the Letter of James, it is written that:

“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”⁷

There has been lots of publicity about Rev. Gretta Vosper’s book, and the theology that is expressed therein. Some have even suggested that Gretta’s theology is beyond the bounds of the United Church. HOWEVER, how many people have looked at both the title, AND the sub-title of her book?

The title is: “With or Without God.”

The sub-title is: “Why the way we live is more important than what we believe”

Why is it that we get preoccupied by theology, rather than ACTION? In theological terms, we have been distracted by discussions of orthodoxy, rather than orthopraxis.

Earlier this summer I quoted Karen Armstrong when she wrote:

“Religion is not what you believe, but how you behave.”⁸

Our central symbol in Christianity is the cross. Imagine that the horizontal beam of the cross is a set of arms that reach out to God’s world.

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, P. 516

⁶ James 1: 27 (The Message – E. Peterson)

⁷ James 2:26

⁸ Karen Armstrong, *The Toronto Star*, September 30, 2006

"Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world."⁹

Any cross that does not have arms that reach out to God's world is not a cross. It is only a stick with vertical dimensions.

One of ways that both of our congregations reach out and serve is through our partnership in DVRR – Don Valley Refugee Resettlement. Together, and with others, we help those who are suffering establish a new life in a new land. That is part of our MISSION. We reach out to those who are homeless and loveless and through our actions we show that they are not alone. God acts through us.

There are volunteers from both of our congregations, plus TUCT and the wider community, who dedicate their time and energy at the Wednesday Drop Inn – serving the homeless, the marginalized – the very people that James wrote about.

I also need to say that if you speak to people who are involved in these programs, you will find that they receive more than they give simply through reaching out – in the way that the Letter of James

describes. It seems to me that this type of focus on the MISSION of the church – reaching out to God's children who are in need - is what God offers to us as a way to find meaning in life, both as congregations and as individuals. After all, we are not here for ourselves, are we?

Each Sunday in August we have begun our worship with a prayer that we might be:
"set free from the service of ourselves."

Once upon a time I visited a Pentecostal church for worship on a Sunday morning. As I turned to leave at the end of worship I saw that there was a sign above the exit to the sanctuary. It read:

"You are entering the mission field."

May we all **BE** THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST as we live our lives this week!

HYMN # 579 – The Church is Wherever

⁹ James 1: 27 (The Message – E. Peterson)

James 1: 17 - 27 – Orthodoxy vs Orthopraxis
Northminster / Newtonbrook United Church, August 30, 2009

Prayers for God's Family & Creation:

This morning we bring you these prayers that are written on our hearts

Generous Giver of life,
in worship this Sunday morning we pause from our hurrying, our scheduling, our cell-phone conversations, and yet we still have anxiety in our minds.

God, we thank you that we are not alone. in life, in death, and in life beyond death you are with us. Amen!

In this time of prayer,
may we feel your calming presence as we take a moment of quiet....

Loving God, we are so captive to the routines of our lives, we confess that we don't take sufficient time to simply be, and not enough time to feel your Holy Presence. Forgive us God.

Heal us O God,
restore within us a love that is truly worth sharing in your world;
a love that flows out the doors of this sanctuary onto Finch Ave; onto Cummer Ave; and on to the streets where we live, and onto the streets of broken homes in the City of Vaughn, into broken lives in Taiwan, and into hearts broken by war in Afghanistan and the Congo.

Our Mother-Father God, we thank you for this time that we have had together over the past two months. It has indeed been an opportunity, and a blessing.