

## **James Writes About THRIVING**

James 2: 1 – 10, 14 – 17 and Proverbs 22: 1 – 2, 8 – 9, 22 – 23  
Rev. Allan Baker at Newtonbrook United, September 6, 2009

### James writes about THRIVING!

This morning I'm taking the approach to preaching that has the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other. It is an approach that proposes how life can thrive here on earth. As you know, the Bible proposes an alternative lifestyle – one that adds meaning to life.

Have you ever imagined that in the Letter of James you would be able to discover how to lead a flourishing life, a life that blossoms, a life that thrives? Have you thought about how relevant James is to today's times?

Have you ever imagined that the Book of Proverbs could be a source of counseling for such a life? Counselling? Is there therapeutic relevance in the Bible for people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Come with me as we take a quick trip through today's readings and we look for something that might help us, and our church, to thrive.

Look at verse five:

***"Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?"<sup>1</sup>***

In theological terms, this is described as God's "preferential option for the poor." It doesn't mean that God doesn't love anyone else – just that God has a special place in God's heart for the poor – just like at Christmas time when we hear a story called The Christmas Carol being read we have a special place in our heart for Tiny Tim.

Proverbs 22: 22,23

***"Do not rob the poor, because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause and despoil of life those who despoil them."***

If God has this preference, what about us?

In Proverbs it is recorded that:

***"The rich and the poor meet together; God is the Maker of them all."<sup>2</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> James 2:5

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We, who are a part of God's family, are gathered in this place on Labour Day weekend.

I think that there is something about Labour Day that continues to be true in verse six of The Letter of James where it is written that:

***"Is it not the rich who oppress you?"<sup>3</sup>  
Is it not they who drag you into court?***

Of course, many of us may not feel oppressed. OR, maybe I'm wrong – possibly many of us may truly feel demoralized, or exploited. We all might consider:

- Is there a deeper significance to Labour Day, other than the fact that this is unofficially the conclusion of summer?
- Have we forgotten the origins of Labour Day, and are we being subtly persuaded into believing that the reasons for the struggles that gave rise to this weekend are a thing of the past?

I think that there is something that continues to be true in The Letter of James where it is written that:

***"Is it not the rich who oppress you?"<sup>4</sup>  
Is it not they who drag you into court?***

GO Train riders may not have been feeling oppressed a week ago when their 8:07 train from Port Credit to Union Station was cancelled. That happens. Imagine how they felt though when The Toronto Star reported the next day that their regular train had been used to transport *"six Pan Am Games delegates and a handful of officials from the committee bidding to bring the Games here in 2015, from Union Station to Hamilton."*<sup>5</sup>

***"Is it not the rich who oppress you?"<sup>6</sup>***

Do you think that "they" would commandeer limousines from under the golden towers of Bay Street to transport the Pan Am officials? Could the elite and their servants not have used the GO Train at

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 22:2

<sup>3</sup> James 2:6 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> James 2:6 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> The Toronto Star, September 1, 2009, page A1

<sup>6</sup> James 2:6 (NRSV)

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another time of the day? Do we live in a system that assumes it is OK to take a train out of service for the purposes of a few?

What has this to do with living a life that blossoms, or thrives; that is a life that flourishes or prospers?

James writes that we:

***“do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>7</sup>”***

This “law” is found first in the Book of Leviticus (19:18), and it is also repeated by Jesus, and written in the gospels of Matthew (22:39), Mark (12:31) and Luke (10:27).

Jesus says this is the second part of the Great Commandment, which begins with the love of God, our Creator – the One who breathes life into us.

Loving our neighbours – especially those who are less fortunate - is one of the best ways to lead a fulfilling life; a life full of meaning. That applies to us as individuals, and to the Christian communities that we call “church.”

That is an alternative way of life!

It is a recognition that life is difficult; and the best way through it is for us to help each other, rather than attempt to profit from each other. Co-operation is like singing in the choir of life where we each make our music following the lead of the heavenly Conductor.

Proverbs 22:9

***“Generous hands are blessed hands because they give bread to the poor.”***

All of us have been made in the image of the loving Creator, who calls us to love and care for each other, and all of creation. The image that we have of ourselves is reflected in the way that we live our Christian faith – as we discussed last week. If we believe that we are no more than individuals, people who always need more, then we are merely consumers.

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<sup>7</sup> James 2: 8

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However, if we believe that we are all children of the loving God, we will live our faith with care and compassion for each other, and for all of creation. We will strive to become the people who God dreams we can be. As the authors of Proverbs write, we will be blessed! We will thrive!

### Hymn # 595 – We Are Pilgrims

#### Questions for reflection:

Proverbs is one of the books of wisdom literature. Can it be a therapeutic resource for urban Canadians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

God's "preferential option for the poor" is a school of theological thought. Is there evidence for this thinking in today's readings?

James has an emphasis on "works"; that is, putting faith into action. What is the "faith" of the Christian community that James makes assumptions about? What does the community believe about God / Jesus?

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Prayers for God's Family and creation

O God, you are Holy Mystery and wholly One;  
we, your children on earth bring to you  
the prayers of our hearts,  
and listen for the prayers that you have for us.

You have created the universe,  
and with it the possibility of being fully human  
and relating deeply with others and with you.

You are the Keeper of your creation,  
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.

Holy One, you are also the One who enlivens the universe,  
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.

Grateful for your loving actions, we offer the thanks of our hearts.

God of all things new, the One who has created and continues to  
create,  
we come to you this Sunday morning in daring hope,  
while the world says, "not possible",  
we dare to imagine:

- peace in Afghanistan
- reconciliation of Palestinians and Jews
- reductions in air pollution and the use of carbon as a fuel
- an equitable distribution of incomes and wealth
- the end of the need for foodbanks
- our own desires for more, that mean that others have less

Peace-loving God, we remember that in 1939, 70 years ago, your  
children in Europe went to war with each other, and millions of your  
people died. May we not forget, and may we be active in finding a way  
to peace.

We take a time of quiet to bring to you the prayers that are written  
deeply on our hearts as individuals.....

We pray in the name of the one who you have filled with grace and  
truth. Amen.