

**“BE DOERS” – Sunday, August 30, 2009
Proper 17, 13 Pentecost, Year B
Grace Church, Haddonfield – The Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

Over the next five weeks our cycle of readings on Sunday (called the lectionary) has us hearing from the Letter of James. This letter contains a series of teachings about what it means to be a Christian. We might call it Practical Christianity 101. Even though the author, whether it was the Apostle James or someone else, spoke to the early church about how to live their lives as Christians. There is timelessness to this letter as it speaks also to us. The message is clear ... to be a Christian is to be someone who acts!

Rev. William Willimon tells the story of how this reading from James reminds us about the joy of making and doing something. He says it is like children coming out of a kindergarten class. Each of them is holding something in their hands that they made, perhaps little dishes of clay. You can see on their faces joy, pride and excitement! They run up to their parents and say, “Look mommy (or daddy) what I made!”

Willimon goes on to say that childhood is unpredictable, confusing and chaotic. Children have a hard time comprehending adults, but they do take joy in making something. Think about all the refrigerator art we have at home, or the bookshelf crammed with the latest craft. Children take joy in contributing to the world. The Christian faith reminds us that before God, we are children. There is a joy that comes in standing before God, holding our little lives in our hands and saying to the Almighty, “Look God, what I did with my life!” What would God see us holding up before the Divine?

The love of God finds meaning in our caring for others. Jesus says repeatedly throughout Scripture to care for the care, to welcome the stranger, to feed the hunger, to help the poor. The Christian faith is marked by ACTION! We are to be hearers and DOERS of the Word! That means there is something more to our faith than sitting here this morning. We are meant to take our faith out into the world and show them by our actions what we believe.

James is helpful this morning. He says that God is the source of all gifts that that gifts must be shared. Herbert O Driscoll says that God’s grace is best channeled through us! Look at James again ... out of love the gift comes from God, and our responses is to be one of listening, watching what we speak, no showing anger ... and that will transform not only us but others!

Thinking about words and actions, I am reminded of the time I was in seminary. We lived in the Washington, DC area and were traveling on the Beltway, the highway that circles the city. Now I must confess that I’m not the most patient person in traffic. And remember that I grew up on a farm and worked in the truck industry. Needless to say, I have a “colorful” language. This particular day, I was driving with my wife, Diane, and Jennifer, then a two year old, was in the back seat.

Then it happened. A car cut me off. Well, what’s your reaction when this happens on Interstate 295? Well, I know, you shout out ... “God Bless you!” “Drive careful!” “Thank you!” Right? Well, no that’s normally not how we react. Like many people, I let out a string of expletives that would make a sailor blush. Two seconds after I shouted those

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words, behind me a child’s voice repeated every word, in the exact same order, that I had uttered. Diane turned to me and said, “It’s time you changed your language.”

Well, it’s time that we changed too. We need to listen to God. We are so busy and the world so noisy that we can’t hear God’s hopes and suggestions. Next, we have to be careful how we speak and resist anger. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians says that anger leads to sin. We must curb our anger. Besides, have you noticed how angry people are today? I have been appalled at the shouting and screaming taking place at the “town hall” meetings on healthcare these days. We have important issues to address around health, but most of these meetings are shouting and shoving matches. There’s no dialogue, just people screaming at each other. Nothing is going to get done this way.

Finally, James says that pure religion is caring for others. He mentions widows and orphans, but we know Jesus said elsewhere that we are to care for others in many more places. To be a Christian is to reach out and help others. This is not just a faith that is focused on us ... it’s one that cares for all people!

These past few days I have been watching Senator Ted Kennedy’s funeral. He is a man who lived a life of politics and faith. Yes, Teddy had failings and made some great mistakes, but he did make a positive difference in the lives of many people. Let’s put aside our political differences for a moment and look at the life of this man. Kennedy was behind the effort to be an advocate for all people, not just those he liked, or looked and acted like him.

Kennedy was a moving force behind meals for wheels that has fed how many thousands of people? He was an advocate for cancer victims and their families (this from his person encounters). He trumpeted better treatment of those with special needs, perhaps motivated by the struggles of his sister. He authored the American Disabilities Act to help people have equal access to jobs and buildings. He supported civil rights, education, and health care initiatives. He was the head of his family after the tragic death of his older brothers, John and Bobby. He was a regular churchgoer. One of his greatest gifts of 40 plus years in the Senate was that of being bipartisan. He reached out to all politicians and looked for ways to work together. How badly we will miss this attribute of Teddy today. Despite his human faults, Kennedy did the best he could to put his faith in action.

How are we doing, from James view, of being Christians? Are we doers of the word? Jesus has called us to be people of action. We are to love one another as we have been loved, forgive as we have been forgiven, make peace, seek justice, respect others, proclaim our faith and share what we have. James speaks across the ages and says that we can improve our lives and the lives of others ... by being doers. So, when we stand before God, with the offering of our lives, filled with joy, what will God see we have done?