

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

September 26, 2021

Psalm 104:24, 27–35 (ESV):

24 O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom have you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

27 These all look to you,

to give them their food in due season.

28 When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

30 When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works,

32 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke!

33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.

35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more!

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Praise the LORD!

First Reading: Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29 (ESV):

4 Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6 But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. 11 Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? 12 Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”

Elders Appointed to Aid Moses

16 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

26 Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.”

29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

EPISTLE: James 5:1–20 (ESV):

Warning to the Rich

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, 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 self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Patience in Suffering

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. 12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

The Prayer of Faith

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 9:38–50 (ESV):

Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

38 John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” **39** But Jesus said, “**Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.** **40** For the one who is not against us is for us. **41** For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Temptations to Sin

42 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. **43** And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. **45** And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. **47** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, **48** ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ **49** For everyone will be salted with fire. **50** Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Sermon 39 – Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Outwaiting Evil”

James 5:1-12

Dear friends,

Still in James today, as the extremely abrupt mood swing that he executes in the middle of our epistle lesson is just too strange not to explore. The first part of this lesson reads like a rant, but we can't just smile and brush it off as such because this is the Holy Scriptures and not just the frustrated scribbling of James. These are God's own words, and I would argue that this isn't quite as out of left field as it seems. James is wrestling with self-satisfied Christians, and he's dealing with all the things that lead us into that self-satisfied mindset. It's not just sheer laziness that leads us to fall into the traps we do in this world, its other things too, and that's why James says what he says.

In the verses before this, James does something similar to the first part of the lesson. He castigates those who think they have control over their life, who think that their life is their own to use as they see fit. This is an easy trap for anyone to fall into. We Americans value freedom and self-determination highly, we like to be our own people charting our own course and following our own dreams. I do not think this is unto itself bad, but James sharply reminds us that it has its limitations. James says that we are not our own people, we are God's children, and that means we are all subject to God's plans, God's timelines, and God's will. We all know God is in control, and I think most of the time we Christians are okay with that, but when God takes control of the exact thing we don't want Him to control, this can make life extremely difficult. James wants people to remember this, God is indeed in control, and that means that what happens tomorrow, what happens next year, and what happens on this or that issue isn't up to us.

That's why I think James says the things that he says next. **“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.”** This is such a weird statement when considered with the rest of the Scriptures. To be rich in this life is something that the Scriptures talk about often, but usually they talk about the challenges and responsibilities that go along with it. Not

James, not here. Here he just shotgun-blasts the rich as if, by their wealth, they had done something wrong. But that's kind of a problem when you think of the rest of the Bible. God does not ask the rich to be not rich. God does not elsewhere talk about being rich as unto itself a problem. So why does James?

Remember what James said previously. He talks about the arrogance of assuming control of your life, ultimate responsibility and ownership of your life. No matter who you are or how much money you have, we all have this problem. We are all guilty of trying to muscle God out of the way so we can take control. Being rich amplifies this tendency in the sinful heart. When we have the resources to accomplish what we want quickly, we become used to this, accustomed to it. That's why James goes on a bit of a tear here. It is not how much money we have that is the problem, it is where our hearts are at that is the problem, and that will be a problem for us until we die. Sinful hearts take everything God offers, all the good God gives us, and twist it into a curse. We twist it into an idol. It doesn't have to be money. It can be a person, a time, a place, anything. Jesus tells us where our treasure is, there your heart will be also. James says, you have laid up treasure in the last days. The Judge is coming and you are treasuring the things of this world, and that is dangerous. To lay up treasure is the exact same as putting up an idol. That's what makes it so insidious. To us, it's just what we want, it's not an idol, it's not like we're putting up a statue and bowing down to it. But God knows our hearts, and He knows that there is a very, very thin line between wanting something and worshiping an idol. Why do we want the things we want? They will make us happy, or make others happy, do something good for our life, restore our health, whatever it is. We quickly invest these things with far more than they are.

I want you to always remember this, because it is an extremely hard line to walk. God does not in any way tell us not to want things. He does not tell us to stop having wants and needs in this world. So the same, God does not tell you to stop having dreams or aspirations. But again, for sinners, that is a fine line. What we want quickly becomes

what we need, what we need quickly becomes what we must have, what we must have quickly becomes what we will take, damn the cost and damn ourselves for doing so. Every sin starts with “I want,” but again, we are going to want things, we are going to genuinely need things. That is not unto itself bad. We just take this and make it bad with our sin, our need for control, our need to know.

James then goes on to highlight fraud, wage fraud seemingly, reminding us that God is indeed a God of justice and He does see the evils and injustices of the world. God and the final judgment to come are what should caution us against indulging in the sins of our flesh, but God and the final judgment are also what encourage us and nurture our patience with the evils of this world. Even, perhaps, I daresay, our own evil. **“7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”** The example of the farmer is great, because the payoff can be a long time coming. Do you see? It is sin that is to be resisted, and that is what James is trying to spur his people to do. Resist sin, and its influences on our actions here and now. Because sin and idolatry are basically the same thing, much of a muchness, that gives us a vector, it gives us a target. Start with what you want. That is the first thing that leads you astray. Then, move onto how you behave towards the sins of your neighbor. That is the next thing that can lead you into sin.

Whether it be what we want, our need to be God, or our evils and grumblings toward our neighbor, sin is always waiting. James is telling you, though, that sin may wait, but you don't have to give in to it. You don't have to feed the little troll inside you, you can choose the right way instead. Jesus has given you faith in Him, He has given you new life, you can do it. It is difficult, sometimes impossible, but for those times repentance is our weapon. We confess our sins to God and to each other, and in that confession we

feed our faith and make it stronger. James says later that we all have seen the purpose of the Lord, the end of the Lord, the whole reason why the Lord God does any of this. Why does He do it? To save you from those very sins. The Lord wants to show compassion on you, Jesus has given you His compassion. It seems like being a sinner is a cage we can't escape from, and we can't, we instead believe that we are the saint that God tells us we are. Even when we cannot see that saint, we look in the mirror and all we see is the ways we've screwed it up, all we see is the ways that our life is screwed up and we can't fix it, none of that changes who God has made us to be, and promises us we will be.

It isn't just sin that is waiting for us, though, as James reminds us. It is the judgment, the final judgment, that waits for all of us. It waits for the world, too, though the world doesn't see it and doesn't care to hear about it, none of that will change the reality of it. One day Jesus will return. That Jesus will return ready to punish, to judge. That knowledge, that none of this is going to last, that all of it will be brought back into line by Jesus Himself, should fuel our patience with evil. Not just his evil, her evil, or the evil of the man, but all of it. We cannot get rid of evil, not our own, nor anyone else's. We are not qualified to punish it, because you and I are the first and last thing in this world that is evil. But we can wait it out, because Christ has set an end date for it. Your evil, mine, all the awfulness of the world, will end. Since it ends, we can wait until then, in faith, in repentance, and in anticipation.

Amen.