

A call to humility, submission, and repentance
Psalm 122 & James 4:1-10

Pastor Amy Besola
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Today's scripture is all about attitude. That's what I hope you leave today's service pondering: How we approach our lives as God's people is important. Yes, our attitude matters.

Our Old Testament scripture today was from Psalm 122. Psalm 122 is a beautiful reminder of the joy we find in worship, the importance of unity, and the necessity of interceding for the well-being of God's people. Our NT passage of James 4 further develops this theme and describes how we can put this goal as the predominate goal of our interactions as believers. As you leave today and go forth, my hope and prayer are that you will carry a sense of gratitude and anticipation. My prayer is that you will experience joy in worship, but also have a burning desire for unity in our church communities. Let us be a people who build each other up, always pointing others to the beauty of God's dwelling place among us.

David's song of ascent is also a powerful invitation both to worship and to reflect. In Psalm 122:1-2, the psalmist begins with anticipation for what it means to go to the Lord's house--there is both joy and excitement. There is a unique joy, a special delight that comes from gathering in God's presence. It's a joy that transcends the physical act of going to a place; it's about entering into the presence of the Almighty.

In the next passage of the Psalm 122:3-5, the psalmist describes both the sense of unity amongst believers and what Jerusalem is like, a city "built to be such that is bound firmly together."

As believers, we are called to live similarly, together and in harmony. Christ's church is called to live in peace and unity, bearing with one another in love.

The next portion of the Psalm really struck a chord with me: Praying for the Peace of Jerusalem. You've seen the news. There are so many horrible images of suffering, for the Israelis but also for the Palestinians. I don't know what the answer is, but I DO know who loves and cares about all the pain and misery--our loving Lord. We are called to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. In the biblical context, Jerusalem represents not only a physical place but also the dwelling place of God. The call to pray for peace is a call to intercede for the well-being of God's people. This can be applied to all circumstances; As believers,

we are called to pray for the peace and prosperity of the Church, both locally and globally. Our prayers should extend beyond our immediate concerns to encompass the broader body of Christ.

During the last few weeks, Pastor Eyde has been preaching on what it means to set our sails for the winds of the Holy Spirit. She has completed a series of sermons on stewardship and so, we arrive at today which is sort of a transitional Sunday. Our church is facing budget deficits, and I would encourage each of you to pray and to follow the Lord's leading in your decisions. If you have not submitted your stewardship pledges, please prayerfully consider what God is leading you to pledge and return them to the church office or the offering plate.

We are bringing November and a month focused on Thanksgiving to a close and we are already on the brink of the Christmas season. It's official: the holiday decorations, cards and presents have been on store shelves for months--even before Halloween but I would encourage you to not rush things - let's ease ourselves into Advent. This time of year is not just about lots of delicious foods and frantic shopping. Despite what TV news suggests it's not just about shootings, or war in the Middle East or Ukraine.

This time of year provides an opportunity for each believer to quiet his/her heart. It's about developing an attitude of gratitude. Instead of lamenting about what you couldn't do, buy or see, I would encourage each of you to soak in the peacefulness of this holiday. I would challenge each of you not to rush past this season to the next and to make the time to continue thanking God for his provision and grace.

This season of stewardship and Thanksgiving has been an opportunity to reflect and to contemplate on how we choose to give back a portion of God's bounty to him. It's also about listening to what the Lord is directing.

Today's New Testament scripture comes from James 4. In this chapter, James provides profound insights into the nature of conflicts, the danger of pride, and the key to finding true wisdom. The theme that resonates throughout James 4 is the call to submit to God. Let us dive into the scripture to glean valuable lessons for our lives.

James begins by addressing the source of conflicts among believers. He points out that wars and fights arise from the desires within us that are at war. These desires can be selfish and self-centered, leading to quarrels and disputes. James emphasizes the

importance of examining our motives and understanding that our unfulfilled desires can lead to discord. As we reflect on our own lives, how often do our conflicts stem from selfish ambitions and unchecked desires?

James does not shy away from condemning pride. He quotes Proverbs 3:34, stating that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Pride can lead us away from God, causing us to rely on our own strength rather than acknowledging our dependence on Him. James urges believers to humble themselves before the Lord, recognizing our need for His grace. How can we actively cultivate humility in our lives and avoid the pitfalls of pride?

The central message of James 4 is encapsulated in verses 7 and 8: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God, and he will come near to you." Submission to God involves surrendering our will to His, acknowledging His sovereignty over our lives. As we draw near to God through prayer, study of His Word, and obedience, we find the strength to resist the devil's schemes. What steps can we take to deepen our submission to God and resist the temptations that seek to pull us away from Him?

James concludes chapter 4 by addressing the uncertainty of life and the need for humility in our plans. He reminds us that our lives are like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. True wisdom, according to James, is found in aligning our plans with God's will and recognizing our dependence on Him. How can we approach our plans and aspirations with a humble recognition of God's sovereignty and guidance?

James 4 challenges us to examine our hearts, confront the roots of conflict, and embrace humility before God. The call to submit to God is not a sign of weakness but a pathway to true wisdom and peace. As we surrender our desires, resist pride, and draw near to God, we position ourselves to experience His grace and guidance in every aspect of our lives.

May the words of James resonate in our hearts, leading us to a deeper submission to God and a pursuit of true wisdom in our Christian journey. James 4:6 reveals who obtains God's grace - the humble, not the proud enemies of God. The word "humble" does not define a special class of Christians but encompasses all believers.

James 4:8: Draw near. Pursue an intimate love relationship with God; It is a lifestyle, a desire, an individual effort between a Believer and God – reflecting on areas of our lives where repentance and drawing near to God are needed.

James begins with a poignant question: "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" It's a question that echoes through the ages and touches the depths of our human experience. The Apostle gets to the heart of the matter, exposing the internal strife that often leads to external conflict. As Presbyterians, we recognize the fallen nature of humanity and the pervasive presence of sin. James identifies the root cause of these conflicts: our own desires. He speaks of the cravings within us that war against our souls. In our pursuit of personal pleasures and selfish ambitions, we find ourselves at odds with one another. This echoes the wisdom of the Westminster Confession, acknowledging the brokenness within each of us and the need for redemption.

Yet, James doesn't leave us in despair. Instead, he points us towards the solution – a call to humble ourselves before God. He quotes Proverbs, saying, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." But don't think we have to do this on our own. God is sovereign; And we have the power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. James urges us to submit ourselves to God, resist Satan, and draw near to God. In our tradition, we understand that our faith is not merely a set of beliefs but a living relationship with the Almighty. It involves a continual drawing near to God through prayer, worship, and obedience.

James concludes with a beautiful promise: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." This echoes the hope we find in Christ – that in our humility and surrender to God, we discover the exaltation that comes from Him alone.

Let us heed the words of James as a call to self-examination and humility. As Presbyterians, may we recognize our need for God's grace, submit ourselves to His sovereignty, and draw near to Him with confidence, knowing that He is faithful to lift us up in due time.

May the peace of Christ dwell richly in your hearts.