

“Practicing What We Preach”

Salado UMC—2 September 2018: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Preaching Text: James 1:17-27—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

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“One man practicing sportsmanship is far better than fifty preaching it”

—(Knute Rockne—1888—1931).

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I held Tom Hoskins’ funeral back in 2016. He was a guy who did things his own way. For example, he came to my office to discuss his building pledge and pulled a piece of trash from my wastebasket. He then wrote on it his \$50,000.00 pledge. At Easter 2015 I began sending Hoskins my sermons. In my computer I have 175 responses from him to one thing or another I wrote. Almost every response was comical, but each also had a deep truth. Here is one example—just as he wrote it:

Excellent effort this year! Would have pledged more if I did not have such an expensive wife. She led me to believe that she was frugal some 52 years ago. And I fell for it. But I was young and other considerations came into play. My congratulations to all who worked for the campaign. When I was chairman of the Finance, back when I had hair and a flat stomach, our budget was in the \$400s. Time flies. Tom Hoskins.

Tom, for some odd reason, loved the book of James. He wrote me:

Dr Mosser: We had a good crowd at the 8:30 for Andy Stoker’s sermon. He was well received. He took his sermon from the Book of James.

I have always liked James. I like his philosophy. I have known many people who like to skip over James. James is too practical for them. James puts too much emphasis on works. It takes away from the teaching of Paul. I think believing and accepting and doing nothing more is a lazy man’s approach to Christianity. It is too easy. That is just my opinion. Anyhow it will be good to get you back in our pulpit where you belong. Tom.

The book of James affirms that living a Christian life entails deeds. While our faith is not entirely based on works, the full picture of being a Christian includes action on our part. Actively living the Christian life requires listening and understanding. Our text today explicitly addresses this issue and sets the framework for the rest of James’s theology. Hear the day’s lesson:

17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. 21 Therefore rid yourselves of all

sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; 24 for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like. 25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:17-27).

Of all the books of the Bible, we could argue that James is the most practical. When I read James, it brings to mind the word “*praxis*.” *Praxis* comes from the Greek word for “action” or “practice.” Thus, sensibly *praxis* emphasizes useful concerns. *Praxis* signifies that we can only learn spiritual truth through experience as a type of wisdom. Thus, *praxis* engages the totality of our being: body, soul, mind, and spirit. *Praxis*, to say it another way, is where theory and practice meet. We could say that stewardship embodies *praxis* in its most elemental mode.

James, our day’s RCL lesson, reminds stewards: “every perfect gift is from above.” God gives to believers that they “become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” This task elects humankind as creation’s crown—icing on creation’s cake. God, in this sense of making humankind creation’s culmination, also gives us great responsibility.

After offering a theological rationale for human duty, James advances practical advice: “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger . . . rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness.” James also promotes this notion. James urges believers to “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.” No doubt, this counsel is as applicable to the Christian life today as it was in the first century. James also adds words about curbing the tongue, caring for the weak, and to “keep oneself unstained by the world.”

From a Christian perspective, *praxis* is where our profession of faith and our serving in God’s realm meet. We could say it is good counsel about stewardship. West Texans might say that *praxis* is “where the rubber meets the road.” From a faith perspective, *praxis* is where our profession of faith and serving God’s realm meet. We, of course, have another and more familiar word for this phenomenon—discipleship.

From time to time we hear, “Practice what you preach” or “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.” These phrases plainly imply that our actions are ways to measure Christian genuineness. It also suggests that the world closely watches believers who profess Jesus Christ. The most cutting description of a Christian is for someone to call her/him a “hypocrite.” That dreaded word “hypocrisy” means to “play a part” or “pretend to be something one is not.” Of the assaults leveled at Christians, the charge of hypocrisy is most wounding. Hypocrites are persons who say one thing and then do another. They play act for gain. They assume one role while in reality living another. Jesus was so insistent about

faithfully following the way of God that he addressed hypocrisy this way: “Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues” (Matthew 6:2).

Stewardship puts our lives where our profession is. *Praxis* is way to say our stewardship is active and based on solid biblical principles. *Praxis* means we do not divide our faith into the spiritual part and the service part—we blend them into a life pleasing to God. Although James is exceptionally practical, he is, of course, also remarkably correct as well!

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