

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
James 1:22-27  
May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Mothers... I have a question. How many times do you remember telling your children that they can have it one way, or they can have it another way, but they can't have it both. It's one way or the other. It's "either/or." You can go the park or you can go swimming with your friends. You can't do both. You can get a new baseball glove or you can get the new video game – but you can't get both. You can have the piece of candy or you can have the cake. You can't have both.

Mothers... this last one reminds me of an old saying, "you can't have your cake and eat it too." Sometimes we might think of such a saying when we are delegating or "dictating" what our children or our grandchildren get or can do. And actually this saying has taken on a couple of different meanings over the years. It can mean that you get either this or that – but not both. But it can also mean that perhaps one has more than they can handle or more than they deserve (you can't have/handle your cake and eat it too). Or perhaps this saying could mean that the two things (the cake and the eating) are incompatible with each other. They don't work together or they contradict each other. I never thought of the saying this way – that is, until I started thinking of the church.

Mothers... I'm glad you are here on Mother's Day. I pray that your day be joyous and memorable. But even though we began with our Mothers this morning – this is not a sermon about Mothers. This is a sermon about the church. This is a sermon about having your cake and eating it too. This is a sermon about going to the cake table and getting your cake and making sure you eat it. This sermon is about going to the park and the pool, about getting the new baseball glove and the video game – this sermon is about both the candy and the cake. This sermon is a sermon about you mothers, you fathers, and all who fit somewhere in between.

The Church is made up of the people of God. Our identity consists of not only who we are in the eyes of Christ, but what we do. They go together. James would firmly make this very point in the Epistle reading for today. He says we are NOT an "either/or" people. Rather, we are a "both/and" family in Christ. And to many who believe that the church is an "either/or" kind of place is mistaken. We are not and we dare not act like we are. Allow me to explain.

Some believe that the church is "either" a church that gathers on Sunday and sings hymns, prays prayers and listens to readings from the Bible – "or" the church goes out, evangelizes outside these walls, cares for the sick and destitute, feeds the hungry, and gives clothing and shelter to the poor. The church is "either" in here, "or" it is out there. However, this is wrong. It's not an "either/or." It's a "both/and."

James talks about being "doers." But what does that mean? One can be a "doer" by doing nothing. Doing nothing is actually doing something – I think. But when James talks about "doing" he is talking about all that we do – in action – in receiving – for the sake of ourselves and for the body of Christ. It's not either other people or yourself. It's not either being in church or out in the masses of the people. It's about both/and. It's about being what God has given you to be for the sake of His kingdom as a doer out there. It's about what God has planned for you as He gives you life and salvation – the act of "doing" what we do in here. James says being a doer means being a doer both in church and in the world where we live.

Right now, mothers, daughters, fathers and sons – all of you are "doers" right here in the Church of Christ. You are doers here. It is good and right for you to be here.

Not to be a doer here would be wrong. Those who believe they can be a doer out there and not in here are missing something special and vital to the Christian life. Some say they can be the kind of doer James is talking about without being a doer in here. That's wrong. Being a "doer" is a both/and – both out there in the world and in this place of worship. Some don't feel it necessary to

be a doer in here on Sunday morning. Some believe that the only real expression of the Christian faith is to be a doer for our neighbor. In reality – there is more than just “doing” for our neighbor.

God’s people gather here because this is the place where the Lord promises to meet you with His precious strength in Word and Sacrament. This is where God’s people gather in support and encouragement for one another. This is the place where God calls us to gather – to sing praises to Him – and to, more importantly, receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting through His gifts. We need what He gives us in here – God is the primary “doer” in here for us. We desperately need it – and we can’t live without it. Be a doer here. Come here. Don’t forsake coming here (much like the writer of the Hebrews would say – don’t forsake the custom of meeting together like some have done).

On the other hand, we can’t ONLY be a doer in here. We can’t believe that the Christian life is only about all this – the rituals, the rites, and the liturgical order. It’s so much more. Remember, it’s a both/and – not an either/or. In the text for today it says, *“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world”* (vv.26, 27). We are blessed to have beautiful music and a rich liturgical heritage at Christ Lutheran. We are proud of it – and the way we worship is an expression of our faith and the life that Christ Jesus has given to us and keeps giving us every time we gather here. But James wants to make sure we know something else. It is possible for a Church to be so taken up with the beauty of its building and the splendor of its liturgy that it forgets that the Christian life is lived out also to the neighbor who may never see the inside of this place. The Christian life for us involves elaborate vestments, beautiful and meaningful hymns and liturgy – but that’s not all. The Christian “doer” also finds himself in the presence of God as he is serving his neighbor. Both/and, not either/or.

Mothers...it’s true that sometimes those poor, huddled masses are our children who need the kind of nurturing that only a mother can give. But it’s more than just for your children – and that includes all of us. We are to be doers of our faith in this place and in the world. James spends a lot of time talking about “doing” our faith. The reason, because James is writing to people like you – Christians. He knows Christians have the gift of faith. But how were they using that gift? James tells them – be doers.

Members of Christ Lutheran Church and visitors – be doers. For the sake of this place which feeds you the life of Christ, for the work that we do together for those we call neighbors in our community – be doers. It’s not only here where we are to express our faith. Remember, Jesus didn’t express His faithfulness to you from inside a Church. He did it on top of a hill on a cross, in public. Today, we gather here for that life He won for us. This is not to be cast aside as something we don’t need and can do without. God forbid we ever think that way. Rather, we begin our life here, so that we can be sent out there, to serve our neighbor. This is service to the Lord. Jesus said, *“When I was naked you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me... When did we do this, they ask... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”* Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.