

September 2, 2018

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Labor Day Weekend – rest and relax and reflect

It is important to take time to reflect, otherwise we get too caught up in our busy-ness and miss out on the healing presence of God

When we are in right relationship with God, we are in right relationship with life, and vice-versa

When I first read readings was struck by how rich, meaningful each one was

begin with Gospel reading, because James' letter interprets the Gospel

What first struck me was need to “wash hands”

- no microscopes, no knowledge of invisible bacteria, but knew to wash hands
- so, there was good reason to have a law about washing hands, and other things

Jesus is not challenging the law, it is important to note

He is challenging how the law is enforced, as if adhering to the law makes you right with God and breaking the law breaks relationship with God

I love the line, “in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines ... and hold to human tradition.”

I fear my own theology all too often is closer to “human precepts” than God's Word

How are we to distinguish between God's Word and human precepts?

Jesus says by our actions – what comes out of us, rather than what goes in.

James takes us a step further, writing, “God gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of God's creatures.”

How do we become “first fruits”?

“be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.”

- “quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger”
- I'll be honest: when I first read this, I thought of President Donald Trump and our world today
- I have to work on myself first

James, then, challenges us to live into our faith, to be doers of our faith

We do this by caring for the least among us, those in distress and in need

I lift this up reluctantly this Labor Day Weekend with its focus on “rest from our labor”

But, I want you to hold on to this truth – “caring for the least among us” is the central truth of our faith.

I dare say, many, most, if not all of you gathered here in worship – if you stop and reflect – are doing exactly that – to the best of your ability

What I want you to reflect on is how your service given makes you feel – fulfilled? satisfied? uplifted?

Service to others in God’s name does as much or more for the server as it does for those served.

This say, though, half-way through the holiday weekend, I want to encourage you to continue to relax and reflect

But, come Tuesday morning I want you to accept the challenge to “be quick listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

And wherever you go, whoever you meet, do so with a smile, love in your heart – even, or especially, for those you disagree with, and offer assistance whenever possible.

This is, to use James’ words, “religion that is pure and undefiled before God.”

May God’s grace and blessings help you live this “religion” out each and every day.

Amen.