

## Till We Get It Right

Receive and respond. Believe and be. Balance and foundation. Both – and.

As we begin exploring some basic aspects of living and of being the church, laying the groundwork so to speak, I invite each and all of you to be open to how the “guiding principles” named in this congregation’s long range plan, and the Scriptures from which they arise, apply just as readily to our individual lives and choices as to our life together as a community of faith. If you are visiting, or “trying on” this congregation, not yet sure if this is where you may settle in, please know that this series of services and ponderings will be just as applicable to you and as our life together.

Also, though we will be spending the next several weeks on guiding principles to faith-full living, each week also “stands” alone, when the situations and circumstances of life may lead you to miss a Sunday you will not then be “behind” or unable to fully participant in the remaining services.

I am eager to hear more about the discernment process which produced this foundation for seeking God’s future. There is a wisdom shown which highlights a great spiritual depth and openness to God. That each of the principles listed are as applicable to individual life as to communal life reflects the understanding that “church” as something more than an organization, as something that has and can exemplify life as God desires.

I have struggled in preparing for today. This passage and principle are so rich that many Sundays could be spent seeking God in the midst of them. They are not something to be briefly reviewed and then filed away. They are a fiber that runs through our lives and they need to be as familiar to us as the hair on our heads (..... or that once was on the head!). Spend time in your personal pondering with them and know that together we will return to them to guide and to mine their great riches.

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This is what I wish to lift up before us in the midst of our worship and in preparation to joining together in Holy Communion. The book of James is written to those who have encountered God through Jesus Christ in such a way that their understanding of life stem from believing and knowing that they have received a great gift, life, all that they are, all that they have, all that they encounter, and all that may be, from God. This life or world view center them in such as way that phrases like “I deserve” “it’s my right” “I’m entitled”... are foreign. At least at their best and most faithful moments.

Martin Luther saw no need for this book to be contained or classified as “Scripture” he was so focused on those who had not had such a life changing encounter. Yet I find that James speaks directly to those who have accepted and invited the Spirit of Christ into their lives, it also speaks indirectly to those who have not, those who are curious, those who are considering, those referred in today’s “church speak” as seekers. James speaks to them not by telling of God’s mighty acts or the life, death and resurrection of Christ, but by inviting them to consider that life might be different, be more than what they are currently experiencing. For often hunger comes before identifying what one is craving.

Hear today that I believe totally in the wonder of God's grace and mercy. Grace being receiving that which we do not deserve, mercy being not receiving that which we do. Salvation comes from God alone and is pure grace, undeserved, unearned, inexhaustible and available to all. There is nothing without and before God. We may ignore, deny or refute, yet that does not change or alter God's power, presence and love.

When we are willing to receive this gift, it becomes the basis of our being. It calls us to be grateful and to see all as ways that we can respond to this great gift and love. Life lived in response is life lived with a deliberateness and awareness that changes everything. Life lived in response is life lived out of the shallows of selfishness, fear and greed and lived in the depth of love, eternity and purpose. It is looking past the symbols to the truth they remind us of or reflect on the hearts of those willing to see.

It is this "receiving and responding" aspect that also sets the church apart from any other community or gathering on this earth. This is what teaches and reminds us that the church's purpose is not to preserve, not to preserve the church, not to preserve tradition, not to preserve certain aspects of feelings. The purpose of the church is to be a vessel and an example of how God's love is made to be both received as pure gift and to be responded to with the totality of life. This is how the church knows that it exists for the transformation of lives and of the world. This is how the church knows that it exists more for those who do not have a life altering relationship with God through Jesus Christ than for those who "are the church".

James calls individuals and congregations to first believe then to be – not to be and shape their beliefs to fit their actions. The principle of first developing, ever examining and always holding our beliefs in front of our decisions, actions and choices, is the discipline which keeps our hearts and minds centered in Christ. As a congregation we must always ask what is our purpose, how does what we are doing, planning, proclaiming and exemplifying help fulfill this purpose. This too is the way for any individual or family to obtain life which is rich and meaningful, life which is beyond self and connected to God.

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Balance is necessary if we are to move forward. We cannot be balanced without having a firm foundation. Balance is the only way to love, God, neighbor and self! Jesus displayed a continually understanding and achieving of a balance where time, teaching, and life responded to and reflected God's love and grace.

As we come to the Table which symbolizes God's grace, retells of Christ's submission and victory, the Table which invites all to receive and respond, may we do so sure of our principle and of our purpose. May we come as those who chose to receive life and respond to love, here may we reclaim our balance and foundation, may we embrace the both/and wonder of life where we can ..... (Micah 6:8) "to justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God" by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.