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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HUMBLE YOURSELVES”

James 4:10-17

■ James 4:10: **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”**

James deals with three distinct problems in verses 11-17. The lack *of*, the need *for*, and the call *to* humility is the common thread that holds them together.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

- The problem in verses 11-12 is relational pride:

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy . But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?

○ Bear in mind what James wrote in 2:8-9: **“If you really keep the royal law”** (the Law of God’s Kingdom) **“found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”**

Now in chapter 4 James warns that those who are critical of a Christian brother or sister are failing to love them, thereby breaking the law. Worse than that they are

critiquing the law, speaking and behaving as though they are above it, as though their wisdom, their desire, and their agenda supersede God’s Law of Love. And as if that isn’t bad enough, they are trying to usurp God’s role as the **“only... Lawgiver and Judge.”** Consequently the church is sickened with {Jas 2:1-4} discrimination, {Jas 3:9} cursing, {Jas 3:14} bitter envy, selfish ambition, {Jas 3:16} disorder, evil practice, {Jas 4:2} covetousness, {Jas 4:1} fights and quarrels.

The antidote is humility that frees us to {Jas 4:8-9} **“Wash [our] hands and purify [our] hearts,” “Grieve, mourn and wail,”** to **“Change ”** shallow **“laughter to mourning and”** hollow **“joy to gloom,”** and which energizes us for right relationships that are notable for their *αγαπε* (agape) love expressed in word and deed.

Let us embrace humility in Holy Communion. This sacrament is both a testimony to, and channel of, God’s mercy and kindness for sinners who do not deserve it.

To take the elements while refusing to love and forgive a brother or sister is a horrible mockery of what Christ Jesus has done, and stands in direct opposition to his will for us. Yet eating the bread and drinking the cup with an attitude of humility toward others opens us to be further reconciled to God and to receive a greater portion of God’s goodness.

- The problem in verses 13-16 is presumptuous pride:

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

It is wise to make decent plans and to work to attain them. It is the height of folly to assume that one’s ambition, knowledge, talents, skill, hard work, perseverance, and good luck guarantee victory.

Even if our plans succeed and we rake in the dough, we will die and that money will be of no use to us. **“Boasting about what [we] have and do – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away”** (First John 2:16-17 {TNIV}).

But futility is not the worst of it: if success solidifies our sense of self-sufficiency (as it so often does) we will rely less on God. We might even come to believe that they do not need God – not really. This is a fatal error from which many never recover.

The antidote is humility that opens our eyes to see that our {1 Pe 1:24-25} **“glory is like the flowers of the field”** which wither and fall, **“but the word of the Lord stands forever.”** Humility that compels us to release our hopes, desires, and plans to God, trusting him for the outcome.

Let us embrace humility in Holy Communion. This sacrament embodies this profound mystery {Lk 9:24}: that

security is to be found only in losing our life for Jesus, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and following him.

To take the elements while presuming to be the masters of our destiny is futile and empty hypocrisy. Yet eating the bread and drinking the cup with an attitude of reliance on God opens us up to be more deeply connected with our Savior and to receive {Jn 10:10} **“life...to the full.”**

■ The problem in verse 17 is omissive (that is to say, neglectful) pride: **“So then, if you know the good you ought to do and don’t do it, you sin.”**

Everything James writes has already been revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures and/or the teachings of Jesus. His readers are not Gentiles who know little of the Gospel and less of its Old Testament framework; they are Jews who cut their teeth on God’s written Word. Some followed Jesus around Galilee and Judea, and the others have been informed about his life and ministry.

They have true knowledge, which is essential; yet they are not acting on it. {Jas 2:14, 17, TNIV} **“What good is it ...if people claim to have faith”** (or knowledge) **“but have no deeds?”** It is no good at all! **“Can such faith”** (or knowledge) **“save them?”** By no means!

To know of another’s need without giving the help we could, to be gifted without serving, to know the truth without telling it, these are a virulent form of smugness. They are, in effect, an arrogant claim that we can (and will) ignore his will with impunity.

The antidote is humility that awakens us to the sovereign authority and power of the Living God, humility which reminds us that {1:27} **“pure and faultless” religion** **“is...to look after orphans and widows...and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world,”** humility that inspires us to {1:22} **“listen to the word and do what it says.”**

Let us embrace humility in Holy Communion. This sacrament is both gift and responsibility. It is an invitation to freely receive the bountiful riches of God’s kingdom, in order to freely share them with others. It is a call to feed deeply on God’s goodness, so we might show other hungry beggars where to find bread.

To take the elements while refusing to act is either to deny the reality of Christianity, or to pervert it into something that is antithetical to the Gospel. Yet eating the bread and drinking the cup with an attitude of commitment to service opens us up to become more like Jesus and to receive the blessings of his Kingdom in fresh, new ways.

This morning the living, life-giving word of the Lord in James 4:10-17 comes to me, to you, to Beverly Covenant Church, as it did to its original readers nearly 2,000 years ago: **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”**