

“Consider the Source”

While studying our Lectionary Epistle Reading, I sought to sum up what James was trying to do get Christians to do. There are, of course, numerous phrases or words, which would encourage the reader of today’s Text to fulfill James’ instructions or purpose. For example, his motto might be “watch your tongue” or “hold your tongue” or “practice your faith” or “do what you say” or “don’t be a religious hypocrite”. Those would all be good slogans but isn’t there something even deeper or more important at stake?

Allow me to suggest what James sought to reveal to believers in the Reading gets at the very heart of our identity. The brother of Jesus Christ focused on our struggles with how we are to be faithful members of the Body of Christ, the Christian Community. How do we come to understand and recognize the way Jesus and God want us to live and relate while we exist in this world? **The slogan or phrase I suggest we use to get at the focus or theme James set forth in today’s Scripture is “consider the source”.**

From whom or what or where do the actions we are thinking about taking come from – what is the source? Even if you and I were not concerned with the topic of what it means to be a Christian, we would be wise to think about and discover the source of the ideas we are thinking of implementing.

For example, we have entered the political season and all candidates are trying to communicate why they should be selected to serve as an official of the government. Unfortunately, when politicians speak, they do not always have an accurate or correct understanding of the facts on the subject they are discussing. So, the audience – the hearers will be tempted to always believe or disbelieve what a candidate says. The way you interpret the claims of a campaigner may simply be the result of your assumptions about the reliability of that person. **However, if you don’t know enough about the person running for office to have a sense of his or her truthfulness, then you may be looking for ways to make that determination. In such a situation, it may well be helpful to discover the source of the candidate’s information.**

If she or he says they read it somewhere but cannot or will not provide the specific details of the source, then I suggest you not stake your life on the accuracy of the report. If the person running for office identifies a supposed expert, then it might be wise to find out the credentials of the “expert”. It would also be good to know whether the expert’s conclusions are held by the majority of experts or, perhaps, just a few of them. Additionally, if the candidate denies saying something you heard him or her say, then the source – the candidate is not very dependable.

In today’s Reading, James is very up front about the Source for the message and life we are called to live in our relationship with the Body of Christ, one another, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. James reminded the reader and/or hearer in **verses 17-18, “Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights, Who does not change or cause darkness by turning. By His Own Will He brought us into being through the Word of Truth, so that we should have first place among all His creatures.”** The Source of “Every good gift and every perfect present” is God! The Creator is

Trustworthy, Consistent, and Intentional. Specifically, our Creator created us through “the Word of Truth”. That sounds familiar doesn’t it? The First Chapter of the Gospel of John makes the same declaration God created everything, including life and light, through “the Word”. So, the Source you and I need to depend upon is God and the Word” – Jesus, the Son of God.

James went on to draw out the implications of our Divine Parent and Jesus Christ being our Source to Whom we are to turn by specifying in **verses 19-21**, ***“Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God’s righteous purpose. So get rid of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the Word that He plants in your hearts, which is able to save you.”*** Yes, we need to “submit to God” and “accept the Word” – God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as authoritative for us – our Source!

James understood depending on and living in accordance with our Source is not merely cognitive – it is doing – action. He warned in **verses 22-24**, ***“Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to His Word; instead, put it into practice. If you listen to the Word, but do not put it into practice look in a mirror and see themselves as they are. They take a good look at themselves and then go away and at once forget what they look like.”*** One is out of touch with his or her self – forgets her or his true identity – does not remember to Whom he or she belongs, when we do not work at putting into practice what Jesus – God’s Word lived and said.

James went on to point out the result of putting the example of “the Word” into practice in **verse 25**, ***“But if you look closely into the Perfect Law that sets people free, and keep on paying attention to it and do not simply listen and then forget it, but put it into practice — you will be blessed by God in what you do.”*** It is clear from the context of all of James’ Letter that “the Perfect Law” is the Agape Self-Giving and Suffering Love of God for us, which Jesus Christ – “the Word” manifested through his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. He taught we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Then, James put forth an additional way to discern the life, which is based on our Source. James stated in **verses 26-27**, ***“Do any of you think you are religious? If you do not control your tongue, your religion is worthless and you deceive yourself. What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.”*** If our mouths – specifically our tongues move mindless of our Source, then the reality is we are living based on a false source. Not only are you and I to put our faith – our connection to our Source into practice but we are also to show God’s Agape Love for others, especially the vulnerable. Our Sunday School Staff and the Kids Eat Free Volunteers are good examples of those who demonstrate God’s Agape Love for those who are vulnerable. If we don’t live our lives don’t put our faith into practice, following from our Source and demonstrating God’s Agape Love toward others, then our religion is false or worse – fake. It may be good to apply the same text on the behavior – words and living of candidates. **Let’s remember and praise our Source. Let us follow God’s example in Jesus Christ – “the Word” – our Source. Amen.**