

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
December 8, 2013**

A Good Life of Gentleness

**James 3:13-18
(122, 740, 639, 727)**



It was a defiance expressed with delight.

That's rare these days.

It's rare in any age.

It is Nelson Mandela's invitation to all of us.

Be delightfully defiant, he said over and over again,
when faced with anything that denies God's right
to see the flourishing of his creatures and his creation.

Mandela's particular defiance was focused on apartheid,
a systemic form of racial oppression and exploitation
that used a distorted and diabolical interpretation of the Bible
to justify the denial of dignity and worth
to entire races of human beings.

Mandela's particular delight was focused on truth and reconciliation,
facing the reality of racism
but not allowing it to define the future.

The future could be, with God as our helper,
a communal delight in the wisdom of pure love,
generating peace, gentleness, mercy, and good works.

Those are the qualities of community
that our text this morning from the letter of James
talks so eloquently about.

These qualities arise from the peace of God
that is rooted deep within each and every one of us.
We have but to understand this reality and yield/consent to it.
As that yielding/consenting happens, we flourish
in every dimension of our lives
as we make peace with God, others, and ourselves.

But let's be clear.

There is a defiant resistance in this peace,
more defiant because it is rooted in God's grace,
to anything that denies the dignity and worth
God gave to all humanity in their creation.

For James in his time,
the great abuse was by the wealthy of the poor.
His condemnation of this abuse of wealth
came directly from the teachings of Jesus,
whose own wisdom was shaped by the Old Testament prophets,
who, in turn, were calling the people back
to the obligations of the covenant to be a blessing.

That's what peace makers do – they bless people
with all the riches of God's grace
in every way they can
with their particular giftedness in their particular situation.

Nelson Mandela is an inspiring example of this.

The testing ground of his peace making
were the struggle against apartheid in South Africa
and 27 years in prison on Robben Island.

He was 71 when he got out of prison.
His long march to freedom lasted another 24 years,
years full of inspiring influence around the world.

He turned his aging into saging,
continuing to develop and deploy the wisdom of peace making
until he passed on this week to that delightful community of God's *Shalom*.
One of the political cartoons this week in South Africa
Pictured Mandela arriving at the pearly gates
with his fist raised in delightful defiance.
I just know that attitude was welcomed.

There are a couple of Mandela quotes
that I think capture the ancient wisdom
that James shares afresh with the early church.
Tradition has it that this James was the brother of Jesus,
so his understanding of the attitudes that shape the behaviour of our Lord
might be deeper than most.
And Nelson Mandela embodied that wisdom for our troubled times.

This quote is from the 2009 movie, *Invictus*,
the story of Mandela's restoration of the Spring Bok rugby team in South Africa
and their victory in the 1995 World Cup held there.

*Forgiveness liberates the soul.
It removes fear.
That is why it is such a powerful weapon.*

This quote was used by Mandela,
but originally written by Marianne Williamson in *Return to Love* (1992).
It captures the soul of the dignity that Mandela embodied and inspired so powerfully.

*Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our Light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?"
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God;
your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightening about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.
It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone,
and as we let our own Light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.*

I leave it there this morning.
Wisdom from James, Mandela, and Williamson
to guide us into a good life of gentleness
as makers of peace.

*May God fill you with the Spirit of LAFter this week,
with the joy of love, aspiration, and faith that we see in Jesus, the Christ,
as you go forth this week to bless the world.*

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