

**2024-09-01 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost James 1:17-27**

**SERMON by The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt**

The Reverend Taylor Mertins tells this story: A small-town sheriff received a phone-call from the station interrupting his Sunday supper. A group of young boys were throwing water balloons at strangers walking along Main Street. The sheriff changed into his uniform and went to find the hooligans.

Sure enough, a group of young boys were standing on the corner with a bucket of water balloons and were striking anyone within distance. As he approached in his patrol car, he expected to hear the boys laughing and hollering, but they were rather quiet. He recognized all the boys from his church and dreaded the phone calls to their parents.

The boys were smart enough not to throw a balloon at the police car. "What do you think you're doing?" he yelled to the boys.

In unison they all solemnly replied, “we’re working for the Lord.”

Mystified by their response, the sheriff sat in his car with one eyebrow raised and motioned for them to explain. The ringleader stepped forward and said, “Didn’t you hear the preacher this morning, Sheriff? He told us to go out baptizing in the name of the Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit. We’ve got Holy Water Balloons and we’ve already made 45 Christians.”

Every good thing in our lives, every generous act of giving, every perfect gift, every blessing, every compliment, is from above. The baptizing boys wanted others to share in God’s goodness. Albeit in an unorthodox manner.

The Lord nurtures, guides, and provides all - everything we need. God supplies the goodness in our lives.

The letter of James begins with a quick assessment of the disciplined life and what it means to live into this identity as James notices the little things in life – the nuts and bolts of our

existence . The small things, little actions, tiny compliments, are the tapestry of our lives giving us the means to shape and build relationships. How we act on God's Word matters.

We have the gift of God's presence and Word in Jesus Christ. We are to turn that blessing into fruit for ourselves and those around us. As children of God we are to be quick to listen, slow to anger and slow to speak. We are to show God's righteousness. It is hard. We jump to conclusions, do not stop to think and we regret what we have said. James has good advice.

We fill our conversations with meaningless words because we are afraid of silence. We jump in because someone might have something to say first. It is hard to not be the focus of every interaction. If we do as James tells us, our conversations might be more fruitful and satisfying.

Instead of relying on our own words, we remember God's Word in Jesus Christ. We trust His words and promises. We are

not alone in our challenges - Emanuel - God with us. He is faithful and journeys with us.

James invites us to be doers of the Word and not merely hearers. Sometimes it is difficult to hear a convicting message and think - "I'm not like that." Or "That's not me!" Or read the Bible and see everyone but yourself in the passage?

The Good News - my sisters and brothers, we are grounded in the scriptures we read, and in the waters of our baptism. Yet, we immediately forget to whom we belong and whose we are before we get to the Go in Peace on Sunday.

Like some of you, I have no recollection of my baptism at age 5. There are no photographs. Shortly after that something happened and my parents did not go to church until they were in their 70's.

I have no idea what my baptism was like, what happened or what I felt as I was baptized. All I know is in that moment God shaped my life and cemented my identity as His beloved child.

I was not raised in the church but at age 12 found a VBS program at the Methodist church and my journey with Jesus began. I raised myself in the faith with the help of wonderful men and women He put in my path during those early years. I remember my baptism and am thankful. Through that I became a doer of the Word in Jesus Christ.

As doers of the word, we bless others in our actions by caring for those in our midst. Years ago, the NC Synod had a program called Love in Action. They used love as an action verb and like James encouraged us to be doers – of love. Next week, we will have the opportunity to show love in action as we work at Promise Pointe.

Over time, life gets in the way and we forget who we are and whom we belong. Instead of seeing others as children of God, we only see fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and our children or worse as our enemy. We easily let the image of God in our hearts slip away and are kept from seeing others as made in His image.

Granted, the Bible does not tell us to stand on the corner of Navarro and Salem Road and throw Holy Water Balloons at everyone passing by. Baptism is discovering our own fullest identity in Christ through His covenant by water and the Spirit.

I invite you to remember your baptisms and be thankful at the font. As you leave, make the sign of the cross in water on your forehead. Remember who you are and to whom you belong then take your love into the world and turn it into action. This is most certainly the Good News of Jesus Christ. Amen