

3.20.22 –Lent 3

“Words of Warning”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

2 Peter 2:1-9 (NLT) ~ Pam

The Danger of False Teachers

But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves.² Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.³ In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.

⁴ For God did not spare even the angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment.⁵ And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God’s righteous judgment. So, God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.⁶ Later, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people.⁷ But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him.⁸ Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day.⁹ So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment.

L: These are Words of Warning from God! C: Thanks be to God.

James 4:1-10 (NIV) ~ Pam

Submit Yourselves to God

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

L: These are also Words of Warning from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Father and Christ, our Lord, please clear our minds of war, violence, sickness, grief, or anxiety. Thank you for those who are praying and will receive this message. May we feel your guiding presence and hear your voice in the words spoken. Help us Lord to heed these words of warning as we listen for the work and live out our faith in community. Help us to discern new ways of listening for the truth. Lord, speak now through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

Happy Spring! We feel it in the air and in our runny nose and allergy eyes! Seriously, in the Northern Hemisphere, the astronomical spring equinox is today, when the days grow longer and temperatures warmer. Just think! This time last week, we had over an inch of snow and ice! Now Forsythias and Daffodils! A tiny spark of hope during another tough week in Eastern Europe.

I would say that the letters we are studying, 2 Peter and James, are more practical than theological. This week is particularly so. Last week we focused on unifying our beliefs (faith) with practice (works). We have been and will continue to listen for God’s voice revealing new areas of practical service to the community and the world. It is working, because several of us felt the spirit-inspired need to help the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, and so we are. And we had a record Sandwich Team turnout on Wednesday! What else are you hearing from God? Let me know your ideas, even if they sound impossible. We will pray together over them, make needed connections, and discern our part.

This week’s message is a bit different, yet not much. The passages are words of warning. For the time it was written, it was to protect the sanctity of the early Christian church, but for us today, they are helpful words of warning about our listening and our discernment. I hope you

know that discernment is a “churchy” word for decision-making or selecting the right choices in terms of our Christian purpose. In the name of Peter, the writer warned that instead of salvation, unorthodox teachers were bringing destructive heresies and incorrect interpretations of Scripture into the church. According to the online *Free Dictionary*, “heresy” means “an opinion or doctrine contrary to the orthodox tenets of a religious body or church.” These were not simply errors; false teachers fabricated Christ’s teachings to suit their own arrogant needs but had no intercession or direction from the Holy Spirit.

The writer was not a doomsday machine; rather, he was warning against the eventual immorality that the teachers’ greed, lust, and envy would bring upon the church. Peter’s concern was that the Master’s truth not be ignored or tainted by falsehoods. This has been an especially helpful warning for decades now. “New age” writers and followers left the church to experiment with spirituality on their own or under humanist teachers in the 1970’s and forward through 90’s and 2000’s. Today, it is still out there in different forms (authors like Eckhart Tolle, gang culture, vampire obsession, witchcraft cults, etc.). They can be celebrities, or subtle and mainstream at times, but eventually bring immorality and financial ruin, rage, murder, and distance from our creator God. According to these Scriptures, they are dangerous and deceptive.

The cure is to be fully supported in the Holy Spirit by prayer, listening for and to God, immersed in Scriptures, and accountable to the body of Christ, so we will not be distracted by flashy things or people. The James passage also deals with such things. The scolding in James 4 is for recent converts who are in disagreement because of bringing past

transgressions to the community (i.e., adultery). Their sinfulness requires repentance: clean hands, hearts, humility, and focus to follow Jesus. They were not finding the fruits of the Spirit; rather, they were fighting with one another over beliefs and ideas. James warns them to turn their “hatred into humility, judgment into justice, and boasting into belief.” These passages made me ponder where does *war* begin? I observe it usually starts with conquest, envy, and greed. James agrees, but specifically says it comes from the inner desires of lust, power, greed, and pride all battling for control. Relevant, huh?

It is healthy to have diverse opinions, especially in a church body, as long as all opinions are respected so that love wins out. The cure for unhealthy conflict is to have a humble spirit. **God opposes the proud.** God rewards the humble by his unmerited favor. Are we obedient? Are we committed and submitted to God? You do not have because you do not ask God. Our fault is we try to gain by self-oriented means or evil deeds when God would give it all to us if we had asked. Sadness, grief, selfish goals may come, but stay closer than ever to God this season. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

During these tough times we are in, it is even more important to listen and pray in God’s presence. This week we will practice the prayer journaling again. We’ll use index cards and pencils. Please write down one specific prayer request or intercession need. You will **not** turn these in; they can be private, and you will keep them close to you – in a Bible, in your prayer journal, or nightstand. The second item to write down will be what you hear in the next minute or two of silence. We’ll be silent so that you may listen for any insights from the Holy Spirit about that person

or situation. You may not hear anything in such a brief time, and that's ok. It takes more time than we have here, but it's a start. You might also jot down your feelings: anxiety, frustration, joy, or praise. Try this technique this week as you pray and read the Scriptures. || *silence for 1-2 minutes for exercise*

Let us come back to awareness of the service now. You may have been thinking about the warnings read today. For the week, ponder what you heard this morning. One of my prayer requests is that Christ will draw adult children and their children back to the church to strengthen and rebuild the generational faith most of us have had in our lives. My hope is for their souls of course, but also for their world view and perspective as they deal with parents' aging and life's difficulties. The love of Christ and the body of Christ is much needed in our world today. So as you interact with family and your friends' children, please share your testimony in a gentle way to share Christ's strength and assurance. We can do that much especially during Lent! And please keep praying but mostly listening! ||

Let us pray, Dear Lord, although the warnings are hard to hear, we thank you for prayer journaling; may it open our minds to you, not false teachers. Let us be committed and obedient this Lent. Let us "notice" your work here and there, confess past sin, and be ready for the church work you are revealing. Please keep us faithful, safe, healthy, and strong, so that we can live out the Gospel and share it with others. In your name, we pray and abide, **Amen.**