

3.13.22 –Lent 2

“Unity of Belief and Practice”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NLT) ~ Pam

¹⁶ For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes ¹⁷ when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹ Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, ²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

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

James 2:20-26 (NLT) ~ Pam

²⁰ How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

²¹ Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. ²⁶ Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

L: These Examples are words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, we ask you again this week, to please clear our minds of war, violence, grief, anxiety, or thoughts of friends who couldn’t be here today. Thank you for those who are praying with us and will receive this message. May we feel your powerful presence and hear your voice in the words spoken. Help us Lord to unify our beliefs and practices so that when others meet us, they meet you. Help us to try new ways of listening to you and for you. Lord, speak now through your messenger. “Amen.”

Let me begin by thanking those who were able to join us Friday in Culpeper to celebrate the life of Mildred Dodson, and to support Lee and

Gene and their families by being present. And to Martha for driving the bus. It meant a lot for us to be there as representatives of her church and faith. She was a quiet, hardworking, faithful woman who was widowed at 41 and raised two boys on her own. Some also shared how much she laughed! And if you look at the photos in her bulletin, you can see that quiet sparkle!

Before we dig into the Scripture, let me define one word in the title of my sermon: practice. When we hear that word, for some it conjures up images of training camps and “batting practice”, for example baseball, (with opening day hopefully April 7th) or football in the summer. For others, “practice” as a noun and a verb means rehearsal like Choir Practice, or Band Practice: “the repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it.” For others, it is used as a broader noun to mean: “frequently repeated or customary action; habitual performance; a succession of acts of a similar kind; habit; custom”: such as nursing practices, or business best practices, or in a spiritual sense, a ritual, like meditation, yoga, or journaling. For our purposes this Lent, it will mean a spiritual ritual like prayer, or an action and deed, like giving to benevolence, making sandwiches, or collecting coats and non-perishable foods for those in need. For James, he calls them “works”. And let us not assume that all people who have generous practices to help others have faith or belief in God. There are many philanthropists out there who do **not** believe in God.

As we go to the 2 Peter passage, this applies. Much like today’s world of skeptics, Peter’s religious and cultural climate were full of skeptics or scoffers. This section of Peter’s letter offers proof that Jesus

was real and not a cleverly devised myth. The promises of Christ were witnessed at the Transfiguration (by Peter, James, and John--Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36). Jesus' miracles and healings were also witnessed and documented by many to justify his power and purpose. These were guarantees to his apostles of His Second Coming. Although we ourselves are not eyewitnesses, we have the opportunity to read the Scriptures as recorded testimonial proof. Reading Scripture every day or even once a week, if that is all you can do, **is** a Spiritual Practice.

From these witnesses we can expect to see God's majesty and experience His power and glory: ³⁰ "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. (Mt. 24:30 NIV)." There is also the prophetic voice from God in heaven at Jesus' baptism: ¹⁶ "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Mt 3:13-17 NIV)."

The prophets from the Old Testament who wrote about the coming Messiah did not create them in fantasy but **received** them from God (think Isaiah and Jeremiah). Some were reluctant volunteers! What they heard from God was not their own motivation. This is why we are "Listening for the Work". We need God's confirmation of our own intuition or opinions about how to best serve the community. We are seeking a lamp shining in a dark place. By our new prayer practices, we are seeking the morning star rising in our hearts, and that means the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are seeking *Kairos* Moments!

Recording those Kairos Moments is another tool or prayer practice. You should have a small journal and I brought a few you can grab from up front on your way out if you did not receive one last Mother's or Father's Day. To do this practice today, we'll use index cards and pencils. Please write down one specific prayer request or intercession situation. 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. While you are writing them down, we'll take the time to be silent, and listen for any insights you may hear from the Holy Spirit about the situation or person. Don't be alarmed if you hear nothing. It takes a bit more time than we have here, but it's a start. It's a "practice", using both verb and noun! You might also jot down your feelings: anxiety, frustration, joy, praise, etc. Try this technique this week as you pray and read the Scriptures. || *silence for 1-2 minutes for exercise*

Let us come back together now to hear from James' epistle. Last week we talked about loving neighbor as yourself, the Royal Law. James continues his commands by giving specific examples of actions that come out of one's belief and faith, Abraham, and Sarah. Abraham is considered the Patriarch of Christianity, because of his sacrifice, obedience, and love of God. His belief in God was put to the test several times, and his actions or practices show a certain unity between belief and practice. Think about Isaac, and the near sacrifice to honor God. Abraham's life (in Genesis 12-25) proved that works are required by faith.

Rahab is James' second argument to prove that both faith and works are necessary. Rahab's repentance for prostitution, and then her bravery

in welcoming the spies, putting her family at risk, and then helping them to escape showed her love of God, and her gratitude for forgiveness (Joshua 2 and 6). Rahab's story shows how works and faith collaborate with the soul to keep the body alive—a necessity in her case and ours. I see this here at UBC in terms of giftedness and Mission Center. Our faith and works are legacy that our small group can continue through serving others in our Mission Center.

Believers are not to simply believe and not act. Our practices are not here to justify our beliefs either. We believers must intentionally unify our beliefs and practices to help and encourage others. We do this by utilizing our spiritual gifts of teaching, evangelism, shepherding (caring for each other), starting new things or helping others to start new things. That is our work for now through the Holy Spirit; these practices of service are what Christ calls us to do. So, in the spirit of Abraham and Rahab, whether you are a saint or a sinner, we are called to unify our faith and works! Please journal about these things as you pray this week as you ponder which practices you will keep after Lent. //

Let us pray, Dear Lord, we thank you for sharing another prayer tool; may it broaden our minds about how to hear you speak to and through our thoughts. Let us be brave in our faith and try a new practice during Lent. Let us journal our prayers, questions of you for the church work, and record what we are hearing for later sharing. Please keep us open-minded, 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.**