

2.20.22 –Epiphany 7

“Riches in Poverty”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

2 Peter 1:1-7 (NIV) ~ Pam

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Confirming One's Calling and Election

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

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

James 2:1-7 (NLT) ~ Pam

A Warning against Prejudice

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

² For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. ³ If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, ⁴ doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

⁵ Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? ⁷ Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

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

Please pray with me:

Father God, please clear our cluttered minds of potential war, violence, the cold, lunch, health issues, and thoughts of our friends not here today. Let us figuratively wash our hands before you and leave our busy thoughts there in the basin. May we feel your presence and hear your voice in the words spoken. Help us Lord to live with holy intention, treating people fairly and listening for your direction. May those at home today feel your presence, strength, and love wherever they are. Lord, speak now through your messenger. “Amen.”

So, were you able to practice any silence last week? More than a minute or 2? How about the breath prayer? Share with me your struggles so I can help you learn them.

Next week will be our combined worship with New Beginning Missionary Baptist Church right here in the Sanctuary. The set up will look odd when you come in (more technology), but please come in! They are NOT bringing drums. It will be a joyful and respectful tribute to Black History Month. Staff are working together on music, and while they asked me to preach, The Pastor and his team will bring the Scripture and a cultural reading or two. Please be here to welcome them as **God** brings the message and an enriching experience of shared worship.

The 2 Peter passage sets us up very well for James 2. It was written after the fifth Roman Emperor Nero's ruthless reign and persecution of Christians, about AD 67 (remember he burned Rome in 63). The Petrine author wrote to a mixed audience of Hebrews and Greeks (to both Jewish and Gentile churches). His theme was a reminder to them of God's knowledge, Jesus' effort, and the need for striving and stability in a world culture of corruption and evil desire. The salvation and faith given to them through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection was equal to the apostles' faith! No competition was valid. Their faith was **enough** to sustain them! True today too; we have **all we need** to live a Godly life through Jesus' divine power. Christ promised and still promises a transformed life—one of renewed mind and spirit!

That transformation is how we escape sin and receive God's supernatural power of "calling," prayer, healing, and divine love. By becoming new creations in Christ, we participate in God's nature through

eternal life both here on earth and forever after. It takes willpower to overcome the world's influences by turning to Christ. We know that our salvation is a collaboration between our desire for goodness and virtue, and God's reward of grace and faith: both human responsibility and divine intervention. Paul writes about self-control in Galatians 5:22-23a: “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and **self-control**.” These qualities, if we persevere to receive them from the Holy Spirit, bring about the agape love which generates our desire and ability to serve others. Also, doing good for others brings about more agape love for others. By our deeds we draw closer to God; and through our deeds, God helps others to see His undeserved grace and the possibilities in their own lives.

This is not a judgmental or conditional situation; equality and justice are absolute. We know there are previously well-off citizens in soup kitchens and receiving aid at local food pantries – the working poor. James 2 instructs us to be humble in all our daily encounters; avoid favoritism and do not judge others by outward appearances (cars, houses, clothing, jewelry, shoes, position). There is great wealth in poverty; one's faith is assessed and strengthened daily when one does not have enough to survive. “Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?” Why do we disrespect the poor, anyway? It may be our fear of poverty, fear of not having enough to live. Or relief – in 1500-1800 the preachers John Bradford, George Whitfield, and John Newton stated a variation of: “There but for the grace of God, go I”.

This passage in James reminds us there is human anxiety in wealth too. Riches come with responsibility, worry, and an earthly end (Matthew 6:19-21: “¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Just think of how expensive and complex today’s security systems are to protect wealth, keeping people out, compared to the image of the generous widow’s mite, where she gave everything she had and trusted God to care for her needs, or the image of the thief on the cross next to Jesus, who begged for forgiveness and went with him to Paradise.

Scripture tells us God chose the poor to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom! Discrimination can be about race, but is also a class issue, based on social position and financial status. James had observed unjust behavior in these areas, as we sometimes do. I must confess in my young adult years, my ambition placed persons of prestige on a pedestal, even though I knew better! It was our culture’s or my job’s reward to be seated at the head table. We see this in churches too. Do you remember the movie, *The Bishop’s Wife*?

“Henry (David Niven) has become obsessed with raising funds, to the detriment of his family life. His relationships with wife Julia (Loretta Young) and their young daughter . . . are strained by his focus on the cathedral. Everyone, except for Henry, is charmed by Dudley the angel (Carey Grant), who persuades the wealthy widow, Agnes Hamilton, to contribute needed funds, not to build the cathedral but to donate her money to feed and clothe the needy (Wikipedia).” Mrs. Hamilton was changed.

James declares this kind of obsession of courting the rich as a sin that stunts spiritual growth. Equity, love, and fidelity are what’s important in kingdom work. We must not insult the poor with our good deeds either.

Listening for the work is not done in the mind, but in the heart. How can we be open to the needs of our community, a neighbor, or to a worker who serves us? We show respect by listening to their stories, paying a fair wage, and turning them over to God for restoration.

So far, you've learned how to be Silent, how to Pray the Scriptures, and the Breath Prayer. Today we'll learn a **Quaker (Friends) New Year's** prayer, called "**Hands Down, Hands Up**":

1. *Start with hands palms down and pray:*

Jesus, I let go of anything and everything I have clung to this year.
The good, the bad, all of it.

I hand it over to You and trust You to do with it as You know best.

Spend time listening to what He tells you or shows you is being dropped. Its ok to mourn the losses and talk to Him about the things you don't want to let go of.

2. *Then with hands palms up, pray:*

Jesus, I receive all that You have for me this year.

Teach me to cling to the things You have for me and let everything else fall away.

What dreams do You have for me to walk in this year?

For what work in this community will you have us prepare?

Spend time listening again and journal about the things you are letting go, the things you are holding onto, and the things you will take hold of in the New Year. Listening to the heart of Jesus is key.

3. *A Year with Hands Held Open*

Throughout the year repeat this prayer exercise to learn to live with hands open, constantly receiving what the Lord has for you and being willing to let go of the things He says you do not need to hold onto.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. The point is to try it! It is another way to "Clear the Decks for Love," by letting go of emotional or spiritual baggage, and open up to hear His direction. These are praying techniques and tools to help us "Listen for the Work" that God will reveal, and to prepare us spiritually for the doing of the new work to

come. // ***Let us pray,*** Dear Jesus, we thank you for sharing how our brothers and sisters of Quaker heritage get closer to you and serve in ways to glorify you and the Kingdom! Help us to try something new. Clear our lives of sin and things we grasp too tightly; open us up to new direction as we trust your teaching to discern your will. Please keep us open-minded, faithful, healthy, and strong, so that we continue to live out the Gospel and share it with others. In your name, we pray and abide, **Amen.**