

## 1.30.22 –Epiphany 4

### “Faith in Action”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### 1 Peter 1:3-6, 13-16 (NLT) ~ Pam

*The Hope of Eternal Life*

<sup>3</sup> All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, <sup>4</sup> and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. <sup>5</sup> And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

<sup>6</sup> So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.

*A Call to Holy Living*

<sup>13</sup> So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. <sup>14</sup> So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. <sup>15</sup> But now you must be **holy** in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. <sup>16</sup> For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

**L: These are the Holy Words of God! C: Thanks be to God.**

#### James 2:14-19 (NLT) ~ Pam

*Faith without Good Deeds Is Dead*

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? <sup>15</sup> Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, <sup>16</sup> and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

<sup>17</sup> So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

<sup>18</sup> Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

<sup>19</sup> You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

**L: These are the words of God! C: Thanks be to God.**

#### **Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we gather on yet another frigid day to be in your presence and to receive instruction. Thank you for the warmth of the building and the human warmth of relationships. As you have already brought us together in worship, we ask you to illuminate your word this morning. Help us to strive for holy living and to listen for your direction. May those at home today feel your presence, assurance, and our love wherever they are. Lord, speak now through your messenger. “**Amen.**”

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[Silence]

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How awkward was that silence for you? Did you think I had “lost it!?” or lost my voice or place? It was intentional to begin our theme, “Listen for the Work.” It was only about 15-30 seconds, but for most of us, silence longer than a few seconds is uncomfortable. Did you hear anything new in this room? The heating units, your own breathing, squirming, coughs? As we go on through the year, you will begin to hear less of you, your wants and surroundings and begin to hear more of God’s voice and direction for our work. It takes practice.

The goal is to listen for the Holy Spirit *Kairos* moments break into the noise of the everyday. This is what the 1 Peter letter is telling the dispersed Christians in exile. These people are scattered through the five Roman provinces in Asia Minor (what is now Northern Turkey). This Peter is likely a disciple of the apostle Peter who lived with Jesus; the name Peter is used to convey authority of the new church, as well as to strengthen and encourage those who will surely face threats to their faith. After praising God for their redemptive faith in Jesus Christ, the author builds up the audience’s identity as the elect and holy people of God. Living holy is to live lives set apart for God’s service yet also to live in the middle of the world’s priorities. That is never easy and preaches strongly to us today! It ties in closely with the James passage, as the author instructs them in 4 areas:

1. To live hopefully in their **new birth** as Christ followers.

2. Their testimony requires **new conduct** (intentions based on social norms) because of Christ's suffering and example.
3. **New behavior** (actions taken based on individual character) is required to show the grace of God to an unbelieving world. And
4. **Obedience** (vs. 14 – making an ethical decision to follow Christ) is required to live out lives worthy of Christ's teaching.

Absolute holiness cannot be acquired in this lifetime, but we must be in the process of conforming to God's will, not out of some arrogance to be better than non-believers, but as evidence of God to them. As sinful humans on this side of the cross, becoming more holy in all we are and do comes to us only through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do have a choice to listen for or deny that transformation. That choice involves a vulnerability and a passion for hearing God speak in the silence. So, prepare your minds, 1 Peter states. It is a matter of discipline and practice to embrace silence when we have such a noisy world! Like exercise, we will do a little at a time, until our listening muscles (both the heart and mind) are stronger.

We will spend time in the letter of James as well. One might say that out of the holiness described in 1 Peter comes the works or deeds demanded in James. Works are the visible fruit of a strong faith, not a condition of faith, but the outward manifestation of one's soul condition. So, how is your soul? January is a suitable time to reassess your faith and fruit, not from a judgment point of view, but from a new year, "new you" opportunity. As a church, we assess our Missions priorities in late summer as we prepare our next year's budget. Let us take the next six months to listen for God speaking to and through us for our community

work and mission focus. Let us be silent and observant to re-evaluate and research the ways God might use this church to reach others for Him. As I stated last week, “listening to our neighborhoods’ needs takes interactions, as well as silence and observation. We must ask God to reveal our work to us, both the immediate and the future needs we are uniquely able to fill.”

A simple faith about Jesus is a good starting point, and that is evangelism! But in our spiritual maturity, both individually and as a church, we make choices whether to stay as we are (cozy and comfortable), or to invite others to learn and disciple with us, and to serve alongside us (cold and messy). Using our church bus, Pedro and I delivered more coats, hats, gloves, and scarves to a hypothermia prevention family shelter at the Governor’s House Inn, across from IHOP on Rt. 50 in Falls Church. None of us knew it was being used this winter by the County, but through our ACCA friend, Mary Lee Dispirito, we kept searching and found a connection. They were thrilled to receive the donations, and immediately gave them out to the residents on that 24-degree day. It took awhile to connect, but God’s timing was perfect! Now this generosity or others’ philanthropy is necessary and helpful, but mainly transactional. Faith in action—deeds done in the context of sharing belief in God’s mercy and performed out of compassion—is transformational. We did listen and persevered for God’s direction, rather than take the expedient way of dropping them at a thrift store for sale. It took patience yet was much more fulfilling for the givers and the recipients. That is the “work” we must listen for this year.

Generosity and patience are fruits of the Holy Spirit, and 1 Peter and James **together** say if we are living holy lives, our actions will be motivated for others and not ourselves. Children are beautiful examples of this inner purity; true they can be selfish with toys, but they are generous with their hearts. Countless stories illustrate how they pay close attention and act: one child collected and delivered clothing, toys, and books for the children who suffered in the Kentucky tornados. Groups are helping the Afghan refugees get settled. When we do good things or give money to others who do good (like our budgeted Missions gifts and the Endowment Fund \$10,000 gift to ACCA each year), we are **not** competing for glory or achievement; rather, we are responding to God's command to be good stewards with his abundant blessings. First, we must acknowledge our many blessings, and second, listen for his voice. Will you commit to silence, Scripture, listening prayer, and obedience? Will you practice new behaviors that reflect Jesus' teachings? Will you find time to be intentionally quiet and alone, so you may "Listen for the Work?" || **Let us pray,**

Dear Jesus, we thank you for being our guide and companion on this missionary journey. Teach us to listen well and to discern God's will through your Word. Let us spend more time with you in quiet solitude and Scripture, listening for the Kingdom work you have for us to do. Please keep us healthy in all ways, so that we can continue to live out the Gospel and share it with others. In your name, we pray and abide, **Amen.**