

First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)
210 North Fifth Street
Ponca City, Oklahoma

The 14th Sunday after Pentecost
September 6, 2009

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalm 125;
James 2:1-17; Mark 7:24-37
the Rev. Larry B Metzger, pastor



There is something very interesting about this letter from James, the brother of Jesus.

In the first place, just to hear from one of the family members is very interesting and exciting. This is the brother of Jesus and if we were in his company there are so many things we would like to know.

For example: what was Jesus really like? Did he ever lose at a game and was he always the best player, or was he the best player?

Did he ever talk back to his mother? I'd like to know. And was Mary ever displeased with Jesus and let him know it? Did she ever say, "Wait until your father gets home." I'd like to know.

I'd say to James all the pictures I've seen of Jesus are pretty serious. He looks compassionate and he looks like a teacher in many of the paintings; a teacher who is intent on getting across a point or lesson. He has a serious countenance like he is engaged in deep discussion; or he is sad or angry.

So, I want to know, did he laugh. Did he have a sense of humor; and if so... what did he laugh at? Did he, like my wife watching America's Funniest Videos gets tickled when someone falls down; especially if they trip and begin running to keep from falling and then... right to the ground. Did he laugh at people falling down? And did he ooo and ahh when animals did something precious? I'd like to know.

Remember Jesus had brothers and least 2 sisters. Mark 6:3 "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the Brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? ..."

He had cousins and was probably an uncle and so I wonder if he liked to be around family at the holy days, you know, like thanksgiving or Labor Day or if he preferred to be friends, maybe off skiing somewhere.

Because James is his brother all these questions begin to come to mind. See, we just keep forgetting that he was human. Oh, yes, it has been drilled in us since the beginning of any kind of Christian education we received that he was divine, but he was also human.

This moves me to the next area of interest in this letter from James about the context of these verses.

The word translated today as assembly is sometimes translated as church. In the Greek, it is synagogue. Synagogue is more than a place of worship. It was also a place of learning, community study and for legal proceedings. (Len Sweet Commentary; Christian Globe Networks, Inc. by Leonard Sweet James 2:1-13)



So what James is talking about is a court case where the accused comes in and there are the lawyers and the people who have standing in the community, who have wealth, they have seats. Their testimony is more valid than the word of a shabbily dressed individual who works at labor.

You see the court system was terribly prejudiced. And the people who make such distinctions are setting themselves up as judges.

Interesting this scripture fell on the observance of Labor Day.

The labor unions were formed because of government and money taking advantage of the worker. Now there is no question there have been times and unions that have crossed the line of legality and morality. But it is equally true that government and business had also crossed the line of being immoral and illegal in its actions.

James weighs in against using one's power and position to gain an advantage or worse, to deliberately place someone at your feet because you can.

Here we are in this huge debate about who can have health care or not. Actually, it is probably more accurate to say, who is entitled and who is not.

Those who have want to make sure they continue to have and those who do not simply need to get a job that has benefits or so the haves don't have to pay for the have nots. Sounds so simple.

Now understand this is not a church issue, unless one wants to talk about the church as an institution for justice, among other things.

But let's say this has nothing to do with the church, the synagogue... you see where I'm going don't you.

James is not talking about one's attitude in a Christian Church; or the practice in the Jewish worship service. He is talking about a follower of Christ, a disciple's behavior in the civil matters like a court dispute.

Last week there was a picture of a person in a serving line in a Tulsa soup kitchen. It was a place where hungry people could come and eat, much like our Friendship Feast.



The person in the photo was heavy which caused a stir with many of the readers. One can only imagine the comments.

Jay Cronley of the Tulsa World wrote an article (September 4) about the nonsense he was reading from people who were upset with this person eating free food. The article was pointing out the rise in the number of people seeking a meal and the demand it is placing on the non-profits who are responding to such needs.

He says, "The Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma sends out almost a tractor-trailer rig full of food a day."

He says the "photo caused an eruption of hatefulness that was almost as surprising as it was distressing and depressing.

"That heaviness could be equated with needfulness is weak-minded even for the worst beer joint at closing time.

"Food for thought: If you think people who just got fired enjoy asking for a meal or if you think people who can't find work, or people abandoned or beaten, or unbalanced people, or drunk people, or homeless people, or people with hungry children, or large people or bone-thin people have fun asking to be fed -- then go to a nonprofit soup kitchen and volunteer for the serving line."

He ends with this, “These aren't tax-shelter-scam people in the food line.

“They're not hiding a microwave from the welfare worker.

“These are men and women and children who would not otherwise get to eat.

“If some of you would enjoy doing something with the Internet besides attacking and disliking, look up nutrition.

“There's probably something in there that has to do with cheap food and weight, with illness and weight; but hurry, before one of your many bosses catches you using the Internet for spreading personal wrath on company time.”

So here we are in a time of debating national health care and insurance companies, medical associations, political parties, drug companies, your neighbors, everybody is getting in on this debate to determine who will have the power to do something, or the power to see that nothing is done, again.

The problem for Christians is this: we are not about power. The cross is the symbol of powerlessness. The cross is the symbol of defeat. As Christians, we do not identify with the powerful, but with love. Love neighbor. Love neighbor. Love God and neighbor, and self.

I wonder, do you find it hard to believe Jesus cheated on a test; or made fun of classmates for being over weight, or under weight. Do you find it hard to believe he would turn his back on healing someone and laugh as they fell to their deaths?

So if we find it so hard to believe Jesus would laugh at someone for making a stupid mistake, or that he would tell them to go get a job and quit asking for food, or say something insensitive to the person in the food line, then why would we who wear his name, why would we do it?

