

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes
July 21, 2024
Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer

Sermon Text: James 4:1-10 / Title: “Words that Calm 9” / Series: “Words that Heal”

Sunday AM Happenings

Ice Cream!

Sunday was National Ice Cream Day, and we celebrated baptisms with blue bell & sorbet. What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? If you make homemade ice cream, do you have a “secret sauce” / special recipe?

Baptism!

We celebrated six baptisms on Sunday morning. How did seeing these baptisms impact you spiritually? Romans 6:1-11 commands us to remember our own baptisms and to think of how we died to sin and have been raised with Christ to new life. What helps you remember that you are baptized?

Core Observations of the Text & Discussion Questions

James 4:1-10

James’ text provides us a diagnosis of why we find ourselves in sustained conflict with other Christians and gives us steps to extract ourselves. The third point (#3 – The Invitation) is not included below.

#1 – The Hope

*Compare the “we” of 3:2 with the “you” of 4:1-3 - James is communicating a very significant but subtle point: we all sin in our speech until the day we die (3:2), but it’s possible to no longer in any way contribute to any conflict in the Christian community from this day forward!

*How can we discern useful from useless conflict? In mentioning “kill” and “covet” in 4:2, James mentions the bookends of the second tablet of the Ten Commands (those dealing with neighborly relationships). James implies that the way to spot useless conflict is when we think, say or do anything that seeks to erase someone’s dignity.

*When we see breakouts of violence in our culture today, James wants us to recognize that such violence started long before with evil thoughts and words.

#2 – The Steps

*James not only holds out this hope of being a “drama-free” kind of Christian, he also gives us practical steps to take when we need to extract ourselves from conflict with a fellow Christian.

***First: Become aware of what you desire.** This point is counter-intuitive, for most of us think we are in conflict because someone harmed us. But, according to James, the deeper issue is that we desire something; another person desires that same thing; and that object of desire is finite (i.e., only one of you will get it!). Discovering what you desire can take some hard spiritual work, but being free from conflict requires that level of awareness.

***Second: Pray for what you desire.** Conflict rages when people look to others rather than God to meet their desires. Sometimes when we pray for what we want, God grants it – and conflict is resolved! Other times, we pray and realize God might have something better and more in mind for us and our prayers begin to change.

***Third: Change what you desire and pray again.** James uses the strongest possible terms to shock us into changing evil or malformed desires – he calls us adulterers, friends of the world, even enemies of God! James is saying that setting our desires right is THE essential piece to being a Christian free of all conflict.

Discussion: Do you believe it is possible to never again contribute to useless conflict? What step is the hardest? Books cited in the sermon: Werner Herzog’s *The Twilight World*