

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

# “Pressure Point- Doubting”

## Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”

**January 21, 2024**  
*James 1:1-12*

I ended last week with the words of Nikita Gill 93 percent Stardust:

“We have calcium in our bones,  
iron in our veins, carbon in our souls,  
and nitrogen in our brains.  
93 percent stardust, with souls made of flames,  
we are all just stars  
that have people names.”

She was inspired to write this after hearing how the astronomer Carl Sagan explained the universe in relation to ourselves: “Our Sun is a second- or third-generation star. All of the rocky and metallic material we stand on, the iron in our blood, the calcium in our teeth, the carbon in our genes were produced billions of years ago in the interior of a red giant star. **We are made of star-stuff.** The cosmos is within us.”

The universe is within us. Particles and particulates from some of those nebulae you might have seen on the reports from the Webb telescope could well be floating around inside us. Because the images themselves that were captured that we were seeing occurred thousands of years ago.

I don't know if Joni Mitchell had her Bible open to Psalm 8 while she was writing “Woodstock,” but she could have for she wrote and then sang,

“We are stardust,  
We are golden,  
And we've got to get ourselves  
back to the garden.”

Like the psalmist, the chorus of the song goes from stardust to the garden, from the moon and stars to the creation around us.

“When I behold your heavens, The work of your fingers, The moon and the stars that you set in place” to “putting all things at our feet– sheep, oxen, birds, fish...”

Did you know that Psalm 8 was the first biblical text to reach the moon. “The Apollo 11 mission left a silicon disc containing messages from 73 nations, including the Vatican, which contributed the text of Psalm 8.”

We are stardust, we are golden.

*<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.<sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*

We have all heard it said, “seeing is believing”. However, I have had problems with that statement ever since I became a parent. I was told when I was going to be a father, “You know you are going to have to give things up.” And I believed him, “I just didn’t know it was the will to live.”

When my first child was born they all said, “Isn’t she beautiful.” I didn’t see it. I wanted to believe it. But I didn’t see it. She was crying and wanting things, bald, with no teeth and purple. Like a smurf. Then, they become teenagers and it doesn’t get any better. They may not have purple skin anymore; but now that purple color has moved from their skin to their hair and they are still crying and wanting things.

Seeing is not believing; believing is seeing. If it wasn’t none of us would want children. We believe in the wonderful day when they will grow a brain, grow up and leave home – miracles of miracles for the most part they do.

Einstein tells us that the work of the scientist begins, not in anything they can see, but in a certain attitude. It begins with a sense of wonder. He warns us that without a sense of wonder we might as well be dead for it is the beginning of all true art and science.

In other words, astronomy didn’t begin when the astronomer looked at the night sky through a telescope. It began when a wee little child saying,

Twinkle, twinkle little star

How I wonder what you are.

Don’t miss the point. If you are willing to believe only what you see, then you will not believe very much, and much of what you believe will be mistaken.

## I

James knew doubting gets us nowhere and that believing is seeing, and that it involves being **ready to act**.

Too often in life we think that we are too small or insignificant for God to do anything through us. Or that we can never accomplish anything because we are not important enough.

James knew that no matter who we were or what position we held we were important to God and could be used by God for great things.

*“...<sup>9</sup> Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. <sup>10</sup> But the rich should take pride in their humility—since they will pass away like a wild flower...”*

Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII, he was called by adoring New Yorkers 'the Little Flower' because he was only five foot four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who used to ride the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department, take entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he would go on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a really bad neighborhood, your Honor." the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.

" LaGuardia turned to the woman and said "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail."

But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He took out a bill and paid the fine. Then he said "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day the New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the grocery store owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

James wanted us to understand that believing is seeing. Too often in life, we allow our fear or our failures in the past to stop us from moving forward into the future. If our dreams are to come true, then we must believe in them enough to be ready to act.

## II

James knew that doubting gets us nowhere and gets us nothing, but believing is seeing, and that involves being ready to act and also **willing to believe**.

James was encouraging the people to believe in a better day. He was encouraging them to believe before seeing. It seemed impossible for them to believe that a better day is coming.

Yet they had to be willing to believe and not be double minded.

To a significant degree, our belief in the possibility of something determines its likelihood of happening. If you believe something is impossible, it becomes impossible. Conversely, if you firmly believe something is possible, you stand every chance of succeeding.

Robert H. Goddard wrote, "It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow." In fact, it is impossible to believe in the impossible – because once you believe in it, it is no longer impossible.

Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that one-day people would be judged by the content of their character and not by color of their skin. His dream became a reality after he died. Is it

complete? No. However, his children and the millions of children who grew up as progeny of that dream are making it happen and made it happen when Barak Obama became President. King dreamed it and believed it into being.

Nelson Mandela wanted the end to Apartheid. He sacrificed his freedom, and when released, lived to see the result of his legacy – a country free from Apartheid.

Oprah, as a child was raised in poverty, and victimized by a family member yet became victorious in her life as she rose above her circumstances and now helps millions throughout the world do the same through her television program, magazine, and charitable organizations.

Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard to pursue his dream of creating personal computers that could be owned by everyone. As a result, he changed the way the world does its work. He started a foundation to provide computers and software free to under privileged children and schools so his dream would truly become a reality even for those without money and he has enlarged that dream to include medicine for Aids and other diseases in countries without the resources to pay for them. He has since received an Honorary Doctorate from Harvard for his accomplishments.

Billy Graham had a dream to create an organization through which he could preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. As a result of accomplishing that dream he has preached to more people than anyone else in the history of humanity. His message based on the Gospel of John 3:16 gave hope to people who needed a fresh start. His was a simple message of beginning again by being born again in Jesus Christ.

You are no different today than these famous individuals were at the beginning of their journey towards their promised land.

What are your dreams? The reality we experience today one hundred years ago would have been considered impossible or a miracle. Even 35 years ago the thought that we would have the ability to speak to someone on a phone that has no wires – cell-phones; or send mail through the air without an airplane – emails – would have been considered by most impossible. Yet, some believed. And because someone had a dream and believed it – they achieved it. They made what seemed impossible – normal.

So when people tell me that they don't believe in miracles; I tell them that they have no imagination, and in fact that they are not a realist – for the reality that we call normal, is what our relatives 100 years ago would have called a miracle. And what we may call today impossible will be tomorrows normal.

If you believe you can or you believe you can't – you're right.

### III

James knew that doubting is deadly to accomplishing anything; while believing is seeing, and that involves being ready to act, willing to believe and finally, **able to be bold.**

To achieve what you believe, you have to be ready, willing and able. James was encouraging us to be bold in our faith and not be “double minded.”

Some people have an idea of leadership that says, “Prove to me that what you are proposing cannot fail and when you have done so, I will give you my support.” My answer to that sort of statement is that by the time I can prove that my proposal cannot fail I do not need their support. By then the time has passed. To be a leader, you have to act with boldness in your belief because the proof comes later.

Robert Frost said of the love between his wife and himself that it was “a love that was

believed into fulfillment.”

Ted Kennedy used at his brother Robert’s funeral the quotation from George Bernard Shaw. “Some people look at things as they are and ask why? I dream of things that never were and ask, why not?”

Now that is true leadership. And as it is true in leadership, it is also true for creative composers like Beethoven or the Beatles, and artists like George Bernard Shaw or Scientists like Prof Martin Rees or Carl Sagan or believers like the apostle James or you.

Whether you are a believer or leader, composer, artist, writer or scientist you begin believing something is true or can be accomplished, explained or created before it is ever seen or done. And if you don’t; it will never be seen or done. You think about that. Amen.