

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- That Good Night”

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

January 28, 2024

James 1:1-12

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light

That was from Dylan Thomas, who wrote it for his father, who he felt had grown tame with age, allowing life simply to slip through his hands. In the poem he speaks of old and good men, wise and wild men, and how often they go gentle into that good night, rather than rage against the dying of the light.

James spoke poetically of this when he said, ⁹ *Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹ For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.*”

Or as the psalmist in Psalm 90 when he had been pondering life's realities as he peered into eternity. Then he said, "The days of years are three score years and ten (70), and if by reason of strength four score (80), but we are soon cut off and we fly away. So teach us to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom."

As the psalmist realize the brevity of life, and how so much of time was spent on the trivialities of life. So he cried out to God saying teach me. Teach me to number my days, to make the most of my days. Teach me not to spent so much time on the trivial, and to spend more on what is beneficial, and eternal. Help me not to let life slip by me as I sleep. Help me to number my days and apply my heart unto wisdom, and so not go gentle into that good night, but rage against the dying of the light. For ultimately, life is not about the number of breathes you take but about those moments that take your breath away.

Look James was say, if you have faith whether you are rich or poor don't be deceived by doubting and put your faith in riches for we all pass away.

“For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes.

We make our life count when we apply our hearts unto **wisdom** or as James said in verse 5 “*if anyone lacks wisdom let them ask it from God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*”

And as we apply our hearts unto wisdom it is then that we experience wonder. I mentioned last week the biography of Einstein – writing by Walter Isaacson. Einstein also said, “that without a sense of wonder, we might as well be dead.” Plato said, “Wonder at the things around you, for wonder is the beginning of wisdom.” He was right. The psalmist never lost his wonder at life, but he didn't lose it because of the great awe he had about God. He knew that God was his dwelling place, and that before everything was brought forth there was God. He had the wonder and amazement of a little child, when he says...“Twinkle, Twinkle, little star, how I *wonder* what you are.” The beginning of life is the wonder-filled praise of God. For without wonder we would discover nothing. Science begins with one person wondering why. Art begins with the wonder of. Astronomy did not begin when somebody tried to see a star or a galaxy through a telescope. It began when someone said, “Twinkle, Twinkle, little star, how I *wonder* what you are.”

Certainly, we have the knowledge to answer questions what, where, when. but we have seemed to have lost the wisdom to ask who and why? These bring us to a place of wonder and praise before God. We have the knowledge explain why a sunset is seen, or how a rose grows; but this doesn't explain the wonder and majesty of the sunset or the beauty of the rose.

We lose this sense of wonder, and this sense of mystery when we get caught up in the mechanics of the way things work. We also often lose the sense of wonder when we begin to think we have all the answers. When we associate wisdom with knowledge.

Einstein called Quantum Entanglement “Spooky action at a distance” when two identical molecules that are separated at a distance which could be in another room or county. And when one thing is done to one molecule the other molecule reacts at the exact time and in the exact way across the distance. Einstein was filled with wonder about it. As he should be, but we all have experienced it. Remember when you had a name of someone you hadn't spoken to in a long while came to mind. And not long after that you received a call, text or email from them. Or studies have been done with identical twins and have experienced things at the same moment even though they were in different parts of the city.

Plato was right, wonder at all the things around you for wonder is the beginning of wisdom. It reminds me of what T.S. Eliot asked, “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” You know we do this at our own peril. For when we lose the wonder, we take for granted our world. As we have gain more knowledge and information, we are only now discovering that what we do with that knowledge and information often shows if we have gained wisdom. We have the knowledge to destroy or to delight, but do we have the wisdom to decide which is right?

It reminds me of the story about the young man who had just received his degree and came bursting out of convocation shouting; “Here I am, World; I have a B.A.!” and someone replied, “Stick around, son, and I'll teach you the rest of the alphabet! Wisdom begins with wonder, but it doesn't end there.

II

We make our life count when we apply our hearts unto wisdom and we discover the wonder of life, and when we are whetted for life. To be whetted for life, is to have enthusiasm for life. It is to seize the day! It is to make the most of every moment. To seize life by the throat and look at it, to embrace it. It is to live it!

The word whetted comes from the proto west Germanic word referring to wetting a stone to sharpen a knife or tool against it or to wet our appetite for what is to come. That is what James was getting at when he spoke of testing or whetting that happens in life because of the hardships that come. He was trying to encourage us and wet our appetite as it were to what God would do in us with the hardship that come our way. For he that began a good work in you will continue it until the day of Christ arrival says St Paul. And James encouraging us in our belief in order to become better and not bitter by what is to come.

The psalmist is trying to tell us to number our days. And James reminds us the days pass like the rising of the sun.

Malcolm Muggeridge, when he went to Calcutta to do a documentary about Mother Teresa, what struck, not by the misery or the mess of life, but by the mission and the amount of Mother Teresa's work. He was captivated by her enthusiasm for life and for her ministry. Just before Muggeridge began his documentary, Mother Teresa came up to him, and with great enthusiasm, she said, "Let's do something beautiful for God.

To be whetted for life is to remember that this is the day that the Lord has made. Let's make the most of it. Let's do something beautiful to God.

At a fundraising dinner for a school that serves learning disabled children, the father of one of the students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question:

When not interfered with by outside influences, everything nature does is done with perfection. Yet my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as other children do. Where is the natural order of things in my son?" The audience was stilled by the query. The father continued. "I believe, that when a child like Shay, physically and mentally handicapped comes into the world, an opportunity to realize true human nature presents itself, and it comes, in the way other people treat that child. "Then he told the following story: Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they'll let me play?" Shay's father knew that most of the boys would not want someone like Shay on their team, but the father also understood that if his son were allowed to play, it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging and some confidence to be accepted by others in spite of his handicaps.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play, not expecting much. The boy looked around for guidance and said, "We're losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him in to bat in the ninth inning."

Shay struggled over to the team's bench put on a team shirt with a broad smile and his Father had a small tear in his eye and warmth in his heart. The boys saw the father's joy at his son being accepted. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the right field. Even though no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base and Shay was scheduled to be next at bat.

At this juncture, do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible 'cause Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball.

However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher, recognizing the other team putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball right back to the pitcher.

The game would now be over, but the pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have been the end of the game.

Instead, the pitcher threw the ball right over the head of the first baseman, out of reach of all team mates. Everyone from the stands and both teams started yelling, "Shay, run to first! Run to first!" Never in his life had Shay ever ran that far but made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!"

Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to make it to second base. By the time Shay rounded towards second base, the right fielder had the ball, the smallest guy on their

team, who had a chance to be the hero for his team for the first time. He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions and he too intentionally threw the ball high and far over the third-baseman's head. Shay ran toward third base deliriously as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home.

All were screaming, "Shay, Shay, Shay, all the Way Shay"

Shay reached third base, the opposing shortstop ran to help him and turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third! Shay, run to third" As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams and those watching were on their feet were screaming, "Shay, run home! Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit the "grand slam" and won the game for his team. That day, said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world.

Shay didn't make it to another summer and died that winter, having never forgotten being the hero and making his Father so happy and coming home and seeing his Mother tearfully embrace her little hero of the day! A wise man once said every society is judged by how it treats it's least fortunate amongst them.

III

We make our life count when we apply my heart unto wisdom and we discover the wonder of life, and are whetted for live and finally understand God **will** for our life.

"Some years ago, Sir Oliver Lodge sat down to write a new catechism. The first question was, "What are you?" The second question was; "What then does the fall of man mean?" Think about those two questions. What are you? And then, what then does the fall of man mean?

G.K. Chesterton came to these two questions in his whimsical, brilliant way. The first one, "What are you?", he answered, "God knows!" Then the second one; "What then does the fall of man mean?" Chesterton answered, "It means that whatever I am, I am not myself.

And he is right. That is because, what we are only God truly knows, and what that means in relation to the fall of humanity is, that we are not ourselves. We are not what we were meant to be, outside of Christ. And in Christ we are not completely yet, what we are meant to be. Yet, in Christ, we are better than we were.

There is within each of us an untapped potential, and unrealized possibilities. There is a will of God for us, not yet received or realized.

To apply our hearts unto wisdom is to realize and receive for ourselves the will of God for us. There is an old Hebridean prayer which is wonderful. "Take me often from the tumult of things into Thy presence. There show me what I am and what Thou hast purposed me to be. Then hide me from Thy Tears." There show me what I am, and what Thou hast purposed me to be.

To see oneself as we real are can be a frightening and shattering experience. Or it can be an enlightening and heightening experience. That is what James was saying, "*Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹ For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes.*

But either way, we are placed beside what God has purposed us to be. And the result for some has been to experience the tears of God. For that will was not fulfilled.

Now there is sin as it really is. Not just transgression of a commandment, but the disappointment of a loving purpose. Not just at breaking of a divine law, but breaking of a divine heart.

To have wisdom is to grasp God's will for our lives. For as Shakespeare said in the final burst of language to end *The Tempest*, "We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

To live our lives as God would have us live them. To fulfill His will for our lives, is to discover true wisdom, and to know the stuff of which dreams are made of is true wonder. And to grasp that because of Him we have enough to accomplish it is wonderful.

Recently, I was reminded of a situation where a person overheard a father and daughter in their last moments together. They had announced her departure and standing near the security gate, they hugged and he said, "I love you. I wish you enough." She said, "Daddy, our life together has been more than enough. Your love is all I ever needed. I wish you enough, too, Daddy." They kissed and she left. He walked over toward the window where I was seated. "Did you ever say goodbye to someone knowing it would be forever?" "Yes, I have," I replied. Saying that brought back memories I had of expressing my love and appreciation for all my Dad had done for me. "Forgive me for asking, but why is this a forever goodbye?" I asked. "I am old and she lives much too far away. I have challenges ahead and the reality is, the next trip back would be for my funeral," he said. "When you were saying goodbye I heard you say, 'I wish you enough.' May I ask what that means?" He began to smile. "That's a wish that has been handed down from other generations. My parents used to say it to everyone." "When we said 'I wish you enough,' we were wanting the other person to have a life filled with just enough good things to sustain them," he continued and then turning toward me he shared the following as if he were reciting it from memory.

"I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.

I wish you enough "'Hello's' to get you through the final 'Goodbye'."

He then began to sob and walked away.

I wish you enough

You think about that