

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
February 11, 2024

“Pressure Point- Stars and Crown”

Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”

James 1:9-18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=sWKRFt5AcDg>

Before Sermon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=DSkASbXy67g#bottom-sheet>

After Sermon

*Light many lamps and gather round his bed.
Lend him your eyes, warm blood, and will to live....*

*But death replied: “I choose him.” So he went,
And there was silence in the summer night;
Silence and safety; and the veils of sleep.
Then, far away, the thudding of the guns.*

--Siegfried Sassoon

This small portion of his poem “The Death Bed”, was written Siegfried Sassoon. He served in WWI with the Royal Welch Fusiliers, seeing action in France in late 1915 receiving the Military Cross for bringing back a wounded soldier under heavy fire and suffering later from “shell shock” -what we know call PTSD today.

He came from a Jewish family of great wealth having lived a privileged and leisurely life until then. The stark difference between the two lives and his emotional and spiritual struggles with what he experienced caused him to search for some solid ground and did so as he worked it out in his published writings with intense anguish which pulled him ever closer to faith and eventually converting to Catholicism in 1957.

His discovered what E.M. Forster has said to describe what great art, music and poetry and faith can do for us. He tells us that they become our "*armor against brutality*".

Every day we work in and or live near the city of Toronto that can be abrasive. The city and the world we live in can rub us raw. It shows us much that is sordid, ugly, vulgar and mean. We have seen some of it of late, on our Newscasts.

But then there is Mozart and Yeats, there is Thompson Hall and there is our place of

worship, and the Word of God, and there is the music of our Choir and worship team, Sunday by Sunday - our "armor against brutality." All of it defends us and deepens us; if we let it.

James reminds us again, that we reap what we sow. That God renders to everyone according to his deeds. To those who by perseverance will receive glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; and to those who are selfishly ambitious and fall into the trap of temptation to doubt the best about us and choose the worst. He says that we will receive it according to our deeds. In doing so, he offers us a choice; and tells us, that by our choice we will be either deepened or diminished.

Now that is what James was getting at, he said, "to those who by perseverance ...will receive the Crown of life...from the Father of heavenly Lights..."

What is it that they are receiving, but glory, honor, immortality, eternal life.

I

There is **glory and honour** in it. Yet, this doesn't necessarily mean there is peace in it. This doesn't mean there is rest in it. Often it means the opposite. It means taking a stand. It means speaking the truth, and "letting the chips fall where they may." It means saying, "this far, but no further." For glory and honour often only comes because of struggle. Yet, we settle for a pseudo-peace--a peace that is not peace, but a numbness of spirit--that which is at peace with sin, and society, when we ought to be at odds with them.

When I think of those who earned glory and honour, I do not think of those who had settled for the status quo, but those who were restless in it. Those who chafed under it. As Spender says:

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Whose lovely ambition was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
Who never allowed gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit,
And who in their lives fought for life
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

At the Veterans memorial service a few years ago in Normandy, a President during his remarks spoke of how, after the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy and Juno, thousands lost their lives, but then he went on to say, that because there was no turning back "the wounded were carried forward..." The wounded were carried forward.

Though the battle raged on the wounded were carried forward.

At the Barcelona Olympics of 1992 there was an incredible moment in track and field event.

Britain's Derek Redmond had dreamed all his life of winning a gold medal in the 400-meter race, and his dream was in sight as the gun sounded in the semi-finals at Barcelona. He was running the race of his life and could see the finish line as he rounded the turn into the backstretch. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain go up the back of his leg. He fell face first onto the track with a torn right hamstring.

Sports Illustrated recorded the dramatic events: As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would say later. He set out

hopping, in a crazed attempt to finish the race. When he reached the stretch, a large man in a T-shirt came out of the stands, hurled aside a security guard and ran to Redmond, embracing him. It was Jim Redmond, Derek's father. "You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son. "Yes, I do," said Derek. "Well, then," said Jim, "we're going to finish this together."

And they did. Fighting off security men, the son's head sometimes buried in his father's shoulder, they stayed in Derek's lane all the way to the end, as the crowd gasped, then rose and howled and wept.

Derek didn't walk away with the gold medal, but he walked away with an incredible memory of a father who, when he saw his son in pain, left his seat in the stands to help him finish the race.

That is what James is saying. We are not alone in it. By God's grace we -who are the wounded are carried forward. So persevere!

Yet, James worries that we will settle for less and become indifferent as he speaks of sin and temptations.

That's the deadliest sin of all, says Robertson Davis, indifference; though theologians call it sloth--an this doesn't mean laziness. For few if any of us could be called lazy. Davis says--and I believe the great theologians would agree--that it means "intellectual and spiritual torpor, indifference, lethargy." One can be as busy and can fill our days with activity, we can run from meeting to meeting, sitting on committees. But if, meanwhile, our feelings and sensibilities are withering, if our relationships with people near to us are becoming more and more superficial, if we are losing touch even with our self, it is sloth. "It is when one lives at all times under a mental and spiritual cloud; it is then that it is always wet weather in the soul." And it is the deadliest of sins.

James says persevere, persevere. Do not give up. Do not give in to the temptations that James reminds diminish us. For when you do you are settling for less than glory, and honor.

Do not settle for indifference. Make a difference. Sign the vivid air with your honour.

II

James reminds us that when we preserve it is never without effect. It brings glory and honor, also **immortality and eternity**. *"to those who by perseverance ...will receive the Crown of life...from the Father of heavenly Lights..."* From the Father and the Creator of the stars of heaven. There will be Stars and Crowns.

Did you see how Joni Mitchell sang at the Grammys this past week. She sang- it was said, "a magical performance of "Clouds" after a near fatal aneurysm in which she had to re-learn how to speak and sing.'

"I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall
I really don't know clouds at all"

"When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you set in place what is humanity that You are mindful of them..."

Wordsworth put it this way:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, Who is our home..."

If God is indeed our home, if He is indeed the One in Whom we live and move and have our being; then we are trailing clouds of glory not only from Him, but towards Him. And as we do so we are meant to leave the vivid air signed with honour.

The Israel Philharmonic orchestra was founded as the Palestine Symphony Orchestra by violinist Bronislaw Huberman in 1936, at a time when many Jewish musicians were being dismissed from European Orchestras before and during WWII.

The finest Palestinian and Jewish musicians over the early years played for the Orchestra magnificently and peaceably.

It was Toscanini who conducted the first inaugural concert in Tel Aviv on December 26, 1936.

Many years later in the city of Jerusalem just as "Desert Shield", became "Desert Storm". Zubin Mehta was conducting the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra with Isaac Stern as soloist, when the sirens sounded, warning that a missile was on its way. If it was not intercepted it would certainly explode and might release poison gas. The members of the audience put on their gas masks, and remained, the orchestra left the stage to go into the wings to get their gas masks and to wait for the all clear.

Then, says the *New York Times*, with "Awesome courage" Isaac Stern returned and played his violin, and what he played was *Bach's Saraband for Solo Violin* affirming the triumph of civilization and order over chaos and death.

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

You think about that. Amen