Doers…Not Only Hearers

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Year B, Fifteenth Pentecost
James 1:17-27
Calvary Episcopal Church, Flemington, NJ

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.” I love the Book of James and I’m excited that we will be exploring these words in the lectionary over the next few weeks. I love it for lines like this one. “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.” It just seems so practical. Think about these words for a moment. Let them sink in. Let them flow through you. You go to church ever Sunday and hear about Jesus. You hear about his extravagant love that defied death itself. You hear about how he hung out with those seen as sinners and outcasts. You hear about how he healed those seen as untouchable and how he spoke and taught with authority. You hear about how he offered abundant forgiveness, even while he was nailed to a cross. We hear about these things week after week, and they are uplifting. They strengthen our journey. You tell yourself, “I’m going to live like Jesus.”

But then, you leave the building, and you go into the parking lot. You get into your car, pull out of the lot, and someone cuts you off. You go on social media, and someone tries to pick a fight. It’s election season, and you se a political ad that just rubs you the wrong way and makes you angry at those who think differently. Better yet, you run an errand at Wal-Mart, you encounter a homeless person, and you just aren’t sure you can trust them with any help you may give them. Everyday life tells us that hearing the word is one thing.

Doing the word is a whole different ball game.

In his words, James challenges us to live out our faith to produce God’s righteousness here and now. Yes, salvation is offered through grace, but that grace works in us and guides us into bearing fruit for God in this life. Grace nudges us to be doers of the world. For James, it is all about having an active faith that keeps our spiritual lives healthy. Think about our bodies. We need to exercise in order to keep our bodies healthy. The same thing goes with our faith. We need to exercise our spiritual life by doing the word in order to keep it healthy.

In fact, James gives us a practical way to be a doer and exercise our faith. If we look at verse nine of chapter one, he says be to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry.” If we did this practical activity, imagine what our interactions would be like. Maybe we would trust each other a little more. Maybe we won’t be so quick to hurt and put down others. Maybe our words would bring healing instead of division. In other words, our actions and what we say would reflect what it is like to live in this Kingdom of God.

Our would often does not follow God. It seems like everyone is out for themselves, trying to make it on their own with little trust in one another. And when we leave this building, these is a temptation to conform

to the patterns of this world and forget who we are and whose we are. We are challenged as followers of Jesus not to conform, but to be doers of the word. This means we live as Jesus lived, love as Jesus loves, and serve as Jesus served. When we do what we hear every Sunday, we plant a seed. This seed grow and grows to transform into the Kingdom of God right before our eyes. Amen.