

Marti McMahon Stanley  
Norwalk Christian Church  
September 27, 2015

### What is Faith?

James 4:11-12

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

---

Anytime I hear the word neighbor I think of Mr. Rogers, maybe it's because I just wrote about him in this month's newsletter. But he was a neighbor James would have liked. His actions and his words spoke well of what he represented. It is said that all kinds of people worked for Fred Rogers on his television set. People who had long hair (which was frowned upon at the time), people who smelled of marijuana and illegal drugs, people of various ethnicities, and of all ages, female and male all worked on the tv set with him. He loved them all, took time for each of them, and made sure they all were a part of the team. In addition to how he treated those around him, he spoke out for those who had no voice and brought a variety of topics up on his show that others would have skirted around. Why? Because those issues matter in the everyday life. James would have been proud of Mr. Rogers.

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

James wrote that for a wide audience, the 12 Tribes, and while it is safe to presume that there were people within those groups judging others, as individuals, I think that sermon's been done. We've heard about planks in eyes before... I want us to expand that thought farther, to judging groups, whole nations. Remember this book was going out to different kingdoms. So thinking of preventing judgments

of whole groups or nations of people. Preventing judgment of whole professions, where whole groups of people live, lumping together educational backgrounds. This idea isn't far off. It's actually right in line. James was smart with this one, the effects that judgments of whole groups have on a society are very real.

Year after year people perform studies on black youth. They ask small children of all races what they want to be when they grow up. They ask them what is possible, what they can do and become. Again during those formative middle school years, children of all races are asked their dreams and aspirations again. Time and time again in these studies black youth respond differently from their white counterparts. Differently from their Asian counterparts. Different from all of their counterparts. They can't see past what they're shown. Black youth can't see past the black role models they have watched in movies or on tv. In most movies, the low-life, the disposable person, the thief, the drug dealer, the murderer, the pimp and the thug are all what race? Black. People identify easiest to others who look like them. So these black youth see how they are portrayed on screen, America accepts the portrayal, and they do too. They expect to live on the streets, to turn to dealing drugs, to stealing cars, to shooting cops, to dying young. Because that's all they see. James wants us to reverse that. James doesn't want us to criticize people or judge whole groups of people. James wants us to praise them. Find something good and compliment them. James wants us to build them up, to bring them in and make sure they know they are part of the team. Once people are shown love and acceptance, once they know they are just like everyone else, regardless of where they came from, the craziest thing happens. They begin to believe it. They have faith in God, faith in community, faith in themselves.

I don't like to tell pastoral secrets, but some are too good to keep quiet. I know a pastor that accepted a position at a good church that had really bad elders. It wasn't that the elders themselves were bad people, they were very good people. They cared about the church, the pastor, the community. But they had no idea how to be elders. They were never taught! Once my friend realized this he bought them all a book on shepherding. A few weeks went by, a few months, and nothing changed. Not knowing exactly what to do, he decided to go out of his way to lavish praise on the elders from the pulpit. And in his praise, he mentioned all the things he envisioned the elders doing

to shepherd the flock. As the elders heard praise of them contacting visitors, well, they began to contact visitors. As the elders heard praise of them visiting the sick, they visited the sick. They needed guidance a model, but they didn't need it in the form of judgment. They needed to be able to envision themselves doing positive things.

This week the Pope made an Address to Congress. At various times, as with any Address to Congress, people on the right would stand and clap or people on the left would stand and clap. But when he started to share the golden rule, everyone, people on the right and people on the left, all stood and clapped. Pope Francis said "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities, which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves." That's the action James is seeking. To show love, to encourage mercy, trusting that the best of people is their true self when they feel love, acceptance and security. Where there is belonging. Trusting that each action leads us one step closer to making this world a better home.

I know Pastor Travis spoke on words last week, the power that our words have. For James words and actions show your true faith. What you do for others, how you speak to and treat others, that is the true test of faith for James. Throughout the book it's the practice of everyday interactions that are of importance. Those daily actions and interactions, those are the test of one's faith for James. James believes that if you have faith, sturdy faith or the faith of a mustard seed, it's shown through your everyday acts. To James faith isn't just something you discuss or believe, it's something lived out in the everyday. It's being a good neighbor. It's standing up for the voiceless. It's making sure positive role models are provided for everyone. It's praising people for what they have yet done. It's treating others the way we want to be treated. That's faith for James.

It might seem like a weird conclusion from two verses on not judging others. Sure, I could tell stories of people and the judgments they face on a daily basis. I could rattle off clever or famous quotes on judging others. But I'm not sure that would get the point across that James was trying to make. Because James didn't simply write those two verses, he wrote them in the context of other verses. He wrote them in

the context of a whole book that is all about action. Specifically how your faith is put into action. How everything you do and everything you say is your faith in action.