

# Just Do It

Sunday, August 30, 2015; James 1:17-27

Rev. Doug Abbott

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The school year is about to begin as many of you have returned from vacation and are gearing up for tomorrow. College students are either back to school or on their way. The baseball season heads for the playoffs and the football season has one more week before kick-off. And our church is anticipating Rally Day on September 13<sup>th</sup> with our new senior minister Ann Kaufmann preaching that day and begins her ministry here on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

Our scripture lesson this morning is very simple, providing us with a blueprint for our spiritual life personally and for our church. James encourages the early Christians who were living under Roman occupation to be doers of the word and not just hearers.

“Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”. “Save our souls from what” you ask? James says it very simply, from the various trials of living.

It is quite evident what these trials of living are in today’s world. As parents, it is raising children to find their way through this competitive and comparative oriented society. As parents, it is trying to meet the expectations of the job market that no longer provides for job security for the long term. For children, it is the same, finding their way through these challenges to mold productive and fulfilling lives. For all of us, it is coping with the unexpected stressors and anxieties of life.

James is sharing with us the necessity of maintaining a religious practice as followers of Christ that brings us through these trials of life and gives us purity of life and perfection of wellbeing as benefits. “Just do it”. Just live according to the teachings of Christ and do what your faith expects of you.

We need to vow that maintaining a faithful religious practice with the teachings of Jesus and all the Biblical prophets is a necessity and not an option. We need to know that our ongoing Christian education, for adults and children, is the most important buffer against being swept away by the tides of fear and anxiety and hopelessness. Faith is a buffer against giving in or giving up.

James tells us in plain and simple language what is pure and undefiled religion: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

I was in the barber shop yesterday. Joe is my barber. Eddie, a retired machinist and Navy veteran, was next in line. I did not know Eddie. He is a likeable guy. Eddie was saying that he is deeply disturbed by the violence happening day after day in our society and world. He said he can no longer watch the news on TV. It is too upsetting. Many people feel the same way. And I don't blame him.

What we need to do is to develop holy resilience through our faith connection to our Lord to keep us strong and to keep ourselves unstained from this world.

This past Wednesday morning, we received a call at 6:00 a.m. from the nursing care home where Sylvia, Pam's mother, is a resident. The nurse informed us that Sylvia had fallen during the night and asked for permission to transport her to the hospital which was granted. Sylvia will be 97 next month. I drove Pam and we followed the ambulance. Sylvia has been widowed for the past twenty years unable to look after herself and Pam has been a primary caregiver. Sylvia's strength has been in decline.

Widows need to be looked after. God is right on. Pam's mother returned to her nursing care facility in the afternoon as no damage was done from

the fall. She was so glad to have Pam and I follow the ambulance and she would wave to us at stop signs. And in the Emergency Room #7, she appreciated the company.

In Biblical times, widows and orphans had no economic or social standing and were outcasts, so the need was acute. Today the need still exists. What is most present in their lives is loneliness. Our presence alone fulfills Christ's ministry.

When Pam and I visit Sylvia, we see many of the aging sitting alone. We have gotten to know several of the people there. One resident, I'll call him David, is a retired pharmacist, a bright man, limited to a wheelchair because of a stroke a few years ago. He is quite conversant and sociable. In the dining room, he sits at a table he has designated the friendship table. Any resident is welcome at any time to be present as friends. And he goes around the rooms in his wheelchair, reaching out to people and seeing how they are doing. His presence is a model of joy as are these others.

Every day, a woman volunteer visits the residents on this floor and brings her lap dog with her. The dog has befriended every resident and has made a home on any number of chairs and laps. And this volunteer with her friendly and caring spirit will do the nails of the women one by one, with the color of their choice.

Every Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m., the minister and a team of lay people from a nearby church lead a worship service for any of the residents. They will go to their rooms, get them in their wheelchair, and push them to the service. There is a traffic jam at the elevators a half hour before and after the service. This church group spreads an abundance of kindness throughout the building.

Reach out to the isolated, the lonely, and the infirmed. By doing this, you stay connected to the teachings of Christ, and fulfill his Word. The reward comes in the doing. You are contributing to the kingdom of our Lord. Make time for it.

Let's now look at the life of a pastor who also took care of the orphans

John Frederick Oberlin, born in 1740 in France, was an extraordinary Lutheran pastor who served in a remote region in Alsace until his death in 1826. In 1767 he became pastor in Ban-de-la-Roche, a remote region in northeastern France, and served there until his death. A firm bond existed between him and his parish. Each morning he devoted an hour in prayer for his individual parishoners. As they went by his house at that time, they did so in quiet for they knew what was happening there.

Then he spent the rest of his time laboring for the material and spiritual improvement of his impoverished parishoners. He practiced medicine among them, founded a loan and savings bank, introduced cotton manufacturing, helped the people build better roads, and brought in modern agricultural methods. His orphan asylums were the beginning of many for the protection of children. He was a man of rare spirituality and got things done. He preached each month three sermons in French and the other in German. His legacy is known as a saint of the Protestant church.

Oberlin College and its town in Ohio were founded in 1833 and named in honor of John Frederick Oberlin. Having read a biography of J.F. Oberlin published in America in 1830, the founders were inspired to create a new community and institution of higher learning, in what was then a wilderness, for scholars and students who wished to be of service to others and change the world for the better, as Oberlin had done in Alsace.

J.F. Oberlin's belief that an enlightened education is the crucible for social change, a sustainable way of life, and a truly democratic system of governance is still alive and well.

The Lord has spoken to you frequently what needs to be done in his name. God has given you messages through the still small voice which asks you to be doers of his word. Don't ignore these messages or put them off. Just do it.