

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 30, 2018

Text: James 5:7-9

Theme: "Family"

Family, we are thankful for family. Time spent together as family can be precious. Family meals can be such a time, but unfortunately, have become much less common. Worship together is wonderful family time as is happening right here, right now. And then there is the family road trip. This can be quite an exciting time. The whole family loads into the vehicle together and off you go. At the end of that trip may be more family you have not seen for a while, maybe your vacation spot, may even be a new home. Whatever it is, you are all in it together.

This can be a wonderful time to connect, to talk, time to turn off some devices. You could play games together, sing silly songs, perhaps stop and see a few things along the way. Yes, this can be a great time, but we also know it can be a little wearing. Here you are in close proximity and there is really no getting away. The songs can grow old, the scenery boring, the road long, the stomach empty and the bladder full. There could be a little complaining, not such a happy place, but still family. *[if you want to share some life experiences here to make it your own, that will be okay]*

We are family, brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are on a road trip. Obviously you need a vehicle for a road trip. As your family grows you need a bigger vehicle. After a while you might need a van sized vehicle, even one approaching boat size. That's what we have here. James

had referred to a boat back in chapter 3 (v 3). It's a nice biblical picture. It's a historical picture of the church. The imagery of the saving Ark was picked up by the church. We have been plucked from the waters of sin and death and the devil through the waters of baptism. We are on the same boat, headed for the same destination. It is a journey of joy. Is it always smooth sailing? Do the sweet notes of contentment always whiff their way across the deck? What do you think?

We are bearing toward the destination. James speaks of it. "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." (vs 1) How can that be the destination? Actually the destination comes with Him, the new heavens and the new earth. It all happens when He comes as judge of the living and the dead. We remember the goats on the left and the sheep on the right. Left is not good, no good, left out of the eternal blessed kingdom, instead the fire prepared for the devils and his angels (Matthew 25:41). But there for those on the right the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (Matthew 24:34). James calls us to focus on this. "Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand." (vs 8) For those connected to Jesus in faith, trust in His promises, there in the presence of the holy God, the hosts of angels, the beauty of the new creation in transformed bodies. This is a destination like no other.

We are on the trip, right now. No, it's not always smooth sailing, the boat gets rocked and the trip grows long. It was so already for those 12 tribes in dispersion that James addresses (1:1). At this time perhaps it had been only 15 years or so since Jesus' ascension. Persecution had come on

the church, persecution which scattered or dispersed believers out to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syria (Acts 11:20). James hints at more persecution. He speaks of the rich who ‘drag you into court and blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called.’ (2:6, 7) Yes, it was a little rough, maybe it was time for Jesus to come back in the same way He had been taken up (Acts 1:11). And all this was almost 2000 years ago. The boat has made many miles since the days of our text.

As the trip grows longer, patience grows shorter. You have probably experienced this on your road trips. There are some people doing some pretty stupid stuff. Now a lot of this is coming from folks not on the boat. They are splashing around in the water. They may be caught up in a mad frenzy to scratch the itch of desire whatever that itch might be. It could be gathering lots and lots of stuff, maybe a whole boat load of goods that are looked upon as gods. It may be cartloads of pleasure and that pleasure cart comes in the color and the shape of whatever a twisted imagination envisions.

Those splashing around in the water could be telling us to come on in the water’s fine, great. They tell us we are crazy ones. “Your boat is going nowhere but down to the bottom one day! So why submit yourselves to all the restrictions of boat life? Jump, it will be freeing!”

Some patience trying events also are happening on the boat. James calls us to be patient, to be patient with one another, be patient brother with brother, sister with sister, sister with brother, and brother with sister. We are in close proximity. Space is not really at a premium (nor is it meant

to be in the church). There is that flaying, drowning man in each of us, the old nature. He would like to be on top by pushing others under. It cries out, “What’s the matter with these people? Why can’t they be more like me? It looks like they are only along for the ride, only taking up space.” Things can change in a hurry. All seems tranquil then suddenly eruptions, disruptions, churnings. James calls us to be patient and the word here is “long suffering” (**makroqume, w**, macrothumeo). “Well, maybe I’ve just suffered long enough and I can’t take it any longer.” Here comes the grumbling which James tells us not to do.

Such grumbling, even grumbling against one another is not new. We see those who might consider the master grumblers in our OT lesson from Numbers 11. At this time they have probably been eating manna for about a year (see Numbers 10:11 and Exodus 16:1). What do they do, what do they cry? “Oh, that we had meat to eat!” (Numbers 11:4) Then they recount all those wonderful foods they had in Egypt and now, “There is nothing by this manna to look at.” (Numbers 11:5) All this bemoaning is pretty much more than Moses can bear and he begins some moaning of his own, crying out to the Lord. Bemoaning does beget groaning.

The journey is long, more road and more sea than we would care to see, maybe more fellow travelers than we care for. “He’s sitting to close.” “He’s breathing on me.” Why does she get the good seat?” It may be a little more veiled on the boat of the church. “Bless his heart, I suppose he just doesn’t know any better.” “I don’t know why she doesn’t come to the

event. Does she think she is better than the rest of us?” “I’m not giving my hard earned money. It will just be wasted.”

“Don’t be grumbling” or even “stop grumbling” James says. The Judge is standing at the door. It’s in line with what Jesus says about being all bothered by the sawdust in your brother’s eye, concern, but being in no position to help because of the 2 x 4 in your eye. Don’t be doing this, says James. And then he says more, something even more urgent.

“But above all, my brothers, do no swear, either by heaven or by earth.” (vs 12) To swear is to bring God into your conversation, maybe into your grumbling to make your point. It is stating your intention to do or not do something and calling God as your witness for emphasis. Maybe it’s a threat to do something drastic if the behavior of someone else doesn’t change. It might be invoking God’s name followed with such threatened actions as, “I’ll throw that book right out the window.” “I’ll just push your nose to the back part of your brain.” “Don’t make me come back there, you’ll be sorry.” “I’ll never set foot in that church again.” “If she’s coming, I won’t attend.” “I’ll send my dollars [both of them, maybe] somewhere else.” On the other hand it could be a oath to God for a certain action if God works in a prescribed way, making a deal with God.

James says in no certain times, “don’t do it.” There is no need if one speaks the truth then yes means yes and no means no, not a matter of maybe or maybe not. James writes, “so that you may not fall under judgment.” It is a serious matter, not a flippant affair to invoke God’s name. God is not interested in being your or my “yes” man.

James does not insinuate that being patient, being long suffering is easy. He reminds us of others who have been the same boat. “As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets when spoke in the name of the Lord.” (v 10) We can think of prophets who suffered and endured like Ezekiel, or Hosea, or especially Jeremiah. They bore up under the load. James points out, “We consider those blessed who remained steadfast.” (v 11) He also puts before us Job. “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord (we are in a better position to see Job’s blessed condition than he was) how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” (v 11)

“Do not grumble,” but we all know how tempting it is to be grumbly. Again we are reminded the Judge is standing at the door. James put this forward as a law statement. But it can also remind us of the Gospel. The Judge who is standing at the door has faced the judgment for us. It is in this light that James statements about the sick brother being forgiven, about confessing our sins to one another light up for us. There is forgiveness for the brother and there is forgiveness for me, for you in Jesus. We forgive as we have been forgiven. In this confessing to one another, it’s not a matter of saying, “Oh, forget about it,” no, it’s, “It’s been dealt with already by Jesus.” Forgiveness we extend is always that earned by Jesus. It is the sweet news our Lord Jesus, our risen Lord Jesus, has given His church to pronounce, forgive those who repent, do not forgive those who do not repent.

Instead of occupying ourselves with grumbling and swearing James gives us much better things to do, praying and singing. Here is a much better way to use God's name.

We are reminded of the explanation to the Second Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." Family members care for one another. Part of that care is praying for one another, for those in need, for those who are sick and for those who are caught up in sin. Members do rejoice with one another. That may burst forth with singing, "Praise God from whom all blessings Flow," is much better than "Ninety Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall."

Family member care for those who have lost their way, wandered from the truth, have gone overboard. Family members don't say, "Good, more room for me," no, "Lord, how can I help bring them to repentance and restoration?" Those on the boat want to always bring more from the sea of death to the waters of life, from the waves to the boat, extend the lifeline of the Gospel and pray the Spirit gives them faith to latch on.

Never lose sight of the destination. Remember the joyous times we have known reaching the destinations of our road trips, the smiles and the hugs and the good times. Some of those smiles are only sweet memories now. We look forward to the smiles, and the hugs and the joys of that eternal kingdom with our Lord Jesus. "Be patient, therefore, brothers,

until the coming of our Lord.” We will not be disappointed. For Jesus’
sake. Amen