

Pastor Roy's sermon from Sept. 2, 2012

Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9, Psalm 15, James 1:17-27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. This word has power to save. God has given us birth by the Word of truth.

What's in a word? Good news? Bad news? When the telephone rings, what will we learn? Who will it be? Will it be a dull, annoying telemarketing call? Will it be a family member or a friend? Someone who needs help or is willing to offer help? Some words are helpful, some are hurtful.

What does James mean by word? Our first assumption when we read word in the Bible is that it refers to the word of God or specifically Jesus as the Word. But this passage seems to be even more specific. Mainly the Gospel and letters of John speak of Jesus as the word made flesh which dwelt among us.

This word seems to be a gift of God planted within us. Jesus taught the kingdom of God being within, growing, being nurtured by faithful choices. It is the gift of God implanted within us—nothing of our own doing. I think we would do well to give some thought to this word planted within us. What word has God planted within you? How has it grown within us? How do we nurture it? How is faith a challenge? Do we see it, with James, within us?—a gift given by God who calls us to care, to practice justice and mercy because we have been blessed with a word of mercy and compassion.

James tells us to be doers of this word. He is reminding us that faith is a verb, what we do, not just something that we think about. Do we take time to notice what word God has planted within us? In response, do we *do* that word for others? James also warns us to listen before we speak, to be careful what we say, and to be in control of our anger—to avoid rage. But for James pure religion is to care for the truly needy.

In our Gospel today, Jesus speaks of dark things within us. That we are not corrupted by external things, unclean things, or in today's language-by germs. We are not corrupted by keeping poor company, we have all the seeds within us for trouble. Today's readings seem to be pointing toward the inward nature of our faith. We receive inward gifts from God. We have received of the goodness of God within us. But we must also be healed inwardly of various ills and troubles.

God has planted within each of us a set of faith gifts. Your faith journey is as unique as you are; and mine, as I. Our journeys are not sightseeing tours, but service projects. We learn, not by thinking, but by doing. You can only do as you are, as you are gifted. We cannot practice our own faith unless we know ourselves, unless we know what the Spirit is doing within us. God is at work, creating within us life and hope and peace.

What is the word implanted within you? How does this word draw you into true religion which cares for others in ways that you are uniquely gifted to do? The life of the Spirit is a life of adventure. God is creatively redeeming us and our planet. You have a vital role to play. Are you listening? Are you exploring with the Spirit the possibilities deep within you? This is Labor Day weekend. Our faith is a labor, yet one which bring new life and hope into our daily life. What opportunities will there be this day, this week to meet our challenges with faithful responses of mercy and peace? Give some time to consider the word planted within you—your faith which has the power to bring you saving hope and peace and hope and peace for those around you.