

“I’m Talking To The Man In The Mirror”
The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – September 1, 2024
James 1:17-27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

There was once a pastor who was just hired by a church. He preached a fiery sermon that got everyone excited. They loved what he had to say. The very next week, he preached the same sermon. The people were a bit confused but thought that the moving in process made it difficult to write a new sermon, so they let it slide. They were still moved by the sermon but wanted more. The very next week he preached the same exact sermon and following the service, the head elder had words with the new pastor. “Hey, what gives? That is the same sermon that you started with!” The new pastor looked at him and said, “yes it is. And as soon as you start doing it, then I will write a new one.”

I’m reminded of a quote by Mother Teresa, "Faith in action is love, and love in action is service. By transforming that faith into living acts of love, we put ourselves in contact with God Himself, with Jesus our Lord."

Scripture tells us, “But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. but those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing."

You see, it's not just about hearing God's word. It's about acting on it, just like the man in the mirror. When he looks at his reflection, if he doesn't do anything about what he sees, he's missing out on the point. Similarly, when we hear God's word, we're called to make a difference, to live out our faith in real and tangible ways.

The point I am making is that we are called to "be doers of the word." It is a call to action that goes beyond mere intellectual understanding or passive acceptance of God's word. It's a call to embody the teachings of the Bible in our daily lives, to let them shape our actions, our decisions, and our interactions with others. This is not a suggestion, but a command from the apostle James, who was known for his practical approach to faith.

The phrase "BE DOERS OF THE WORD" implies a dynamic, active engagement with the scriptures. It's not enough to simply listen to or read the word of God;

we must also put it into practice. This is a challenge that requires us to move beyond our comfort zones, to take risks, and to make sacrifices. It's a call to live out our faith in a way that is visible and tangible to the world around us. In a sense, it is saying that if we really believe all this stuff in the Bible, then we must see if it works in our lives. We must do what we believe.

This involves a process of internalization, where the word of God becomes a part of who we are and influences our thoughts, our attitudes, and our actions. It's about making the word of God a guiding principle in our lives, something that shapes our behavior and directs our paths.

Not an easy task: It requires discipline, commitment, and perseverance. It's a lifelong journey of learning, growing, and striving to become more like Christ. It involves constant self-examination and repentance, as we continually strive to align our lives with the teachings of the Bible.

The Bible is full of teachings about caring for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. As doers of the word, we are called to act on these teachings, to stand up for justice, to show kindness and compassion, and to make a difference in the world around us. Those are the teachings of Jesus as we have also learned in Matthew 25. Even though it still confuses some people, simply put, we are to care for others no matter who they are.

We are called to be co-laborers with Christ, to participate in His work of redemption and restoration in the world. This involves sharing the gospel, making disciples, and serving others in love. We must put ourselves out there and trust that Jesus is walking with us as we minister to others.

Many equate our service or good works as trying to earn our salvation. We can never earn our salvation. We can never do enough to pay the price of our sin. But salvation is a gift of grace, freely given through faith in Christ. We don't have to earn what is already a gift given to us. But as recipients of this grace, we are called to respond in gratitude and obedience, to live out our faith in a way that honors God and reflects His love to the world.

In doing so, we are slowly transformed. We will become more like Christ, day by day, as we strive to live out the teachings of the Bible in our daily lives. It's a challenging journey, but it's also a rewarding one, as we experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from living in obedience to God's word.

Over the years, several of you have taken these words to heart. You have stepped up and put your faith in God. For those of you who have, you get to see true miracles. You are active participants with God in making this world a better place. You have changed lives. You have helped those who genuinely needed it. And your reports to me have been nothing short of remarkable.

The man in the mirror, as described in the book of James, is a rich image that captures the contrast between hearing and doing. The man in the mirror looks at his reflection, sees himself, but then walks away and forgets what he saw. This is akin to hearing the word of God, understanding it, but then failing to act upon it. It's a reminder of the futility of knowledge without action.

Our spiritual journey begins with self-awareness and self-reflection. When we look into the mirror, we see ourselves as we truly are, flaws and all. This is a moment of truth, a moment of self-realization. But the real test comes after we walk away from the mirror. Do we remember what we saw? Do we act upon it? Or do we simply forget and carry on with our lives as if nothing happened?

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "Only the believing obeys, only the obedient believes." Belief is not just about acknowledging the truth; it's about living it out. It's about obedience to God's word. It's about taking action based on what we've learned and experienced.

The man in the mirror is an active participant in his own spiritual journey. He doesn't just hear the word; he does it. He doesn't just see his reflection; he remembers it and acts upon it. This is the essence of true faith. It's not just about knowing; it's about doing. It's not just about understanding; it's about living.

Our life **is a call** to action. It **is a call to** live out our faith in real and tangible ways. It **is a call to** be doers of the word, not just hearers. It **is a call to** remember our true selves, as reflected in the mirror of God's word, and to act accordingly.

In the words of St. Augustine: "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe." The Man in the Mirror, then, is not just about seeing; it's about believing and acting upon that belief. It's about living out our faith in a way that is consistent with what we see in the mirror of God's word.

A woman who loves to attend church services is moved by a sermon on serving others. She decides to volunteer at a local soup kitchen every week. One day, she's serving soup when a homeless man looks at her and says, "Thank you for

being here. It's nice to know someone cares." She realizes that her actions, though seemingly small, are making a significant difference.

It is not always easy. It requires commitment, perseverance, and a willingness to step out of our comfort zones. It requires us to look at our own reflections in the mirror of God's law and to act accordingly. It requires us to be honest with ourselves, to recognize our shortcomings and to strive to overcome them. It requires us to live out our faith in a way that is visible and tangible, not just to ourselves, but to those around us.

We are blessed in our doing: This blessing is not necessarily material or worldly, but it is a blessing, nonetheless. It is the blessing of knowing that we are living in accordance with God's will, that we are making a difference, that we are being true to our faith. It is the blessing of being doers of the word, not just hearers.

Conclusion

So, let's not just be hearers of the word, let's be doers. Let's take what we've learned today and apply it to our lives. Let's live out our faith in real, tangible ways. Let's be the hands and feet of Jesus in our communities, our workplaces, our schools, and our homes. Let's not forget what we look like in the mirror of God's word, but let's act on it, and be blessed in our doing. Amen.