

## ***What Tomorrow May Bring***

*James 4: 7-8, 13-17*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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I was in my thirties and he was in his seventies. Hunter Pitts and I were breakfast buddies. Every few weeks we would meet at Shoney's for sausage, eggs, grits, toast and about 76 cups of coffee. We'd express suitable outrage at the crazies of the world and agree on the proper solutions for world problems, if only people would listen to us. When we could eat no more, I'd waddle out. As we parted I'd say, "See you Sunday at church, Hunter!" He'd always reply the same way, "I'll be there. If nothing happens." If nothing happens. Hunter Pitts had a healthy fear of the Lord. He was a man of his word and he reliably followed through on his intents. But he knew that what we intend is not necessarily how it's going to go. Many barriers could intervene. Only by God's grace would he get where he purposed to go. Now Hunter was a man who took pride in the work he did as an engineer, pride in the way he dressed, and pride in the honorable way he conducted his life. But all his pride in being a good person was conducted in the humility of acknowledging a sovereign God. His respectability came from his respect for the reality of God.

This morning, we have heard James speak to us about the way we consider our plans and our futures. As usual, he does not mince words. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life, for you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes?"

Who knows what tomorrow may bring? In a moment everything can change. How we know that! How we have had to learn that lesson so expensively! With trembling for what lies ahead, we discover that vigor and health do not endure forever. With tears on our faces, we realize that no situation or relationship can be taken as granted. With fear in the pit of our stomachs, we have seen how our sense of security is an illusion. With shame, we know that our pride in our skill, our strength, or even our family can get turned on its head in a second.

When we are pretty sure we have all we want and need, we feel it slip through our fingers. We lose jobs we thought we had always. We lose loved ones

we thought would be with us forever. We lose marriages we promised to keep. We lose friends we thought we knew better than we know ourselves. We lose our place, lose our nerve, lose our minds, and lose our way.

To live with even an ounce of reflection on reality is to know that pride is ill-founded. All our joys are laced with the sorrow that they are fleeting. We get duped because our media always bring us a fresh stream of strong athletes and beautiful actors and ravishing models. It looks like power and strength and youth never run out. But that's only because the images we see are always replenished with new faces. For us, in the real world, we know it's all running away. As the hymn says, "Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away. They fly, forgotten as a dream that dies at break of day." We are stung by the way our lives are passing and even the greatest loves will be sundered, for a while, by death. We are frail. We are fragile. We are not in control.

So where does that leave us? For a moment, perhaps, in despair. Nothing is the way I thought it was. There are so many perils that I feel simply paralyzed. What's the point of anything? Should we be like the pagans Paul quoted in his letter to the Corinthians: Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die? Shall we cry: YOLO! And plunge ahead into whatever pleasure we can find. That way, of course, lies only despair.

Once again James has smacked us. But he has in view helping us discover the eternity that underlies this mortal world, and the joy that can be ours in every moment.

He wants us to know that if we stay stuck in ourselves, this news about reality can send us into a tailspin. If we insist on being our own masters we will rule over a rather decrepit realm. If we cling to the pride of our own wills, we will be left with what we have chosen, stewing in the juices of our sorrow and anger.

But we need not be left in ourselves. The Triune God of grace specializes in meeting us when we turn to him in need. Earlier, our passage said, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." The pride that comes from keeping up the illusion that I am self-sufficient actually puts me in opposition to the God who loves me. But humility leads me to him. Submitting my will leads to God's lifting me up. It leads me to embrace the reality of my finitude so I can relax into the infinite love of God.

So we read in Psalm 61, “Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” We live in South Louisiana and I think it’s fair to say we are now the kings of natural disasters. We know what it is to have our feet knocked out from under us. Time and again we see the humbling of many waters. It has given to us survivors a lot of wisdom. We’ve found a deeper resiliency than we knew. We get our feet knocked out from under us and realize we don’t need to find our feet in this world in order to settle ourselves on the rock of Christ. We’ve learned that we do not need to be in our homes to find our home in Christ. Even our city, Baton Rouge, has seemed at times like the ends of the earth, a strange and foreign place. But we turn towards it in service because our citizenship is first of all in Christ. It is not shame to cry out when our hearts are faint. We call to him when we are out of control. We plead for a rock on which we may rest, a rock that is stronger than I am, a rock that is higher than I am.

He does not disappoint. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. It does not matter how far you have been away from him. If you sincerely turn towards him, God will rush to meet you. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up. Not in your own strength, but in his. His arms are a rock that no wave can move. The LORD God is our fortress and our shield. In the shadow of his mighty wings, we may shelter. Leaning back on his everlasting arms, we may trust that he holds us. He does not withhold himself from those who seek him. We worship a God who may be found. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, we come upon what seems at first a very bizarre image. The writer reminds us of the time long ago when the LORD God revealed himself to the people of Israel on Mt. Sinai. In those days, fire blazed on the mountain, and the smoke from the fire caused a darkness to cover the land. A tempest raged and howled around the mountain. A heavenly trumpet cut through the winds and then the voice of the LORD spoke. So awesome was that voice that the very mountain trembled. The people fell down on their faces and begged the LORD to cease speaking. His reality was too much.

Now here is the bizarre part: Hebrews tells us that this great, terrible, wonderful, event was just a preview. As real as the revelation on Mt. Sinai was, there is more to come. We read, “At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us remain grateful for a kingdom that cannot

be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe...”

The Lord shakes the things that can be shaken in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. One day, his revelation of his glory will be so real and complete, that this whole world will be shaken until all that remains is that which is fit for the new heavens and the new earth. Even now, though, we experience this shaking process through the events of the world.

When our worlds are shaken, what can be knocked away is knocked away. Only what cannot be shaken remains. Only what is eternal: faith, hope and love remains. We do not know what tomorrow may bring. When that reality slams against us, we may feel undone. That very loss of pride, that shaking of my control, sends me to the things that cannot be shaken. We are sent to the God who waits for us to turn to him. We are directed to the God who promises that if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us.

Jim Solomon is fond of saying, “We may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.” For though our circumstances have changed, God’s promises have not. Our anchor-hold remains strong. The arrival of Jesus in our flesh still shows us the depth of the love of God. The cross of Christ still brings us his forgiveness. The resurrection of Jesus still confirms that death does not have the last word. The ascension of Jesus reminds us that he reigns now, and appears before the Father as our advocate and friend. The return of Jesus assures us that one day all this broken world will be remade and set right. These realities have always been and always will be. They cannot be shaken by anything that happens in this world. God holds the future, as he does us, in his sovereign, nail-pierced hands.

With a proper perspective on our frailty and God’s sovereignty, we are free to conduct our lives with optimism and even joy. We begin with the humility that says of every plan, “If the Lord wills, we will do this.” Then we begin to see just how much it is granted to us to do. We begin to realize how much God has willed to bless us. We begin to turn striving into gratitude. We begin to turn yearning into peace. We begin to rejoice in each breath, each encounter with a loved one, every kind of weather and all kinds of activities. When control over life and the world has passed from me to the Lord, I am free to enjoy and give thanks even as I serve him.

So this leads to one more insight that comes from knowing how swiftly the time passes and how we do not know what tomorrow will bring. My favorite movie over the last several years is *About Time*. It was directed by Richard Curtis,

more famous for his films like *Notting Hill* and *Love Actually*. Like his other movies, *About Time* is not suited for children, but it does have some funny and poignant insights about life. The movie tells the story of Tim Lake as we grows into adulthood. The twist is that on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, his father tells him a family secret. The men in the family can travel back in time to revisit particular days in their lives. They can relive events they have been through and take a second chance to savor those days and even do them better. By the end of the movie, however, after going through marriage, career, children and the death of his father, Tim declares that he has stopped going back in time to relive certain days. He lets time flow away like it does for the rest of us.

We're all travelling through time together every day of our lives. All we can do is do our best to relish this remarkable ride. And in the end I think I've learned the final lesson from my travels in time; and I've even gone one step further than my father did: The truth is I now don't travel back at all, not even for the day, I just try to live every day as if I've deliberately come back to *this one day*, to enjoy it, as if it was the full final day of my extraordinary, ordinary life.

We don't know what tomorrow may bring. We won't get another chance to live these days again. But what if we lived each day as if this was the very day we picked to come back to? What if we savored every ordinary day as a day we would have chosen to gratefully engage as part of an extraordinary life full of wonder and opportunity? If we have yielded our pride to the sovereignty of God, we are free to do this. If we have found him to be our only security, our only sure future, then we can enter each present moment as a gift. And we can engage the challenges of each moment with thanks. Even the hard ones become opportunity to praise him. Even the challenges become gateways to serve him. Even the suffering links us more deeply in communion with the one who suffered for us.

Now is the time when we need these promises more than ever. Who knows what tomorrow may bring? Not a job, not a home, not a person, not a breath is guaranteed. Who knows what tomorrow may bring? Not I. I know only that I will need him every hour, more than ever. That is the dying of pride, and, what do you know, it feels wonderful! To need him without hesitancy, without pride, is joy sweet and deep. The things that can be shaken have been shaken. But what cannot be shaken remains. Oh draw near to God today. Bring him your wounds. Bring him your losses. Bring him your need. Bring him your feelings of having a wave knock your feet out from under you. Bring him the sense of being lost on the trail. Bring him all of it. Call for him to put you on the rock that is higher and stronger than you are. Draw near to God that he might draw near to you.