

Homily : September 8, 2024

Isaiah 35:4

Psalms 146

James 2:1-10,14-17

Mark 7:24-37

In the verse about fear Isaiah is reflecting on *the return of the redeemed to Zion*. Fear is to be banished; God will insure the repair of the people of Israel to their land and continued existence. The prophet sings the praises of the Land, though the unclean shall not travel the Holy Way.

Fear typically appears in the Scriptures as the command Fear God. In the King James Version the word appears nearly 400 times in the Old Testament, and God or Lord appears in over one hundred of the selections. The Gospel writers employ the fear fifty times, but only in Luke do I find God linked with fear, and only on two or three occasions.

Jesus drives his message through positives, starting with love, though brother James begins his second chapter negatively. I take his words: Do not take faith as allowance to turn people into objects. New translations use the negative imperative with Partiality and Favoritism on how not to regard people. The King James uses the word Respect.

If one sees one person as better than another, he or she fails to be brother or sister to all.

Apparently, the old saw Clothes Make The Man (or woman) has operated for over two millennia. Elites have worn fine apparel and jewelry ever since humankind initiated rites and ceremony. Standards adapted to the Dressing Down of the twentieth century, but the mind quickly discerns from any outfit and demeanor from the upper crust.

Why is it natural to show partiality, favoritism, or respect to our so-called betters?

Over indulgence of the so-called betters diminishes when one regards what others think as immaterial. I remember reading that caring about what other people think is a sign of immaturity. How others think of me may be important to them, but too much concern on my part is harmful to my psyche.

Fear associates weakly with partiality or too much respect. Fear is natural. During the days of Adam and Eve and for a while thereafter, size was critical. Strong, large men stole women, and killed men who defended their wives. Morals were, for the most part, in the future, to be learned.

Fast forward to the present: my work in management finds that size still matters as more than metaphor. Mind has taken size from physical dimensions and extended the concept to power. The standard case confers the boss with being larger than his or her subordinates. The concept goes further and

broader, and, under many conditions. A diminutive wife is larger than her mate when hubby handles finances poorly and she takes over.

Similarly, the folks James rails against are symbolically bigger than most of the rest of us. Socialization promotes acceptance of authority, and, without thought, Mind often categorizes accouterments of wealth or power as representing the same. The rich at Church may be bigger, but their power is mostly exercised elsewhere. Almost automatic is painting authority based upon appearance.

Apparently, where one sits in church has been an issue forever.

Sitting in judgment was a key role of important Old Testament figures starting with Moses and Joshua. When one judges, he or she raises self above the brother or sister or group judged. When one judges, the observer has information far more limited than Joshua, Samuel or the kings who followed. Putting personal judgment on someone complicates cognitive processing for the judge.

The mystery of God precludes full knowledge, but for good reasons, the prophets, Jesus, and epistle writers command Do Not Judge.

However, James judges—big time, by stating that the rich oppress people. When a leader speaks of oppression, supporting peace and tranquility usually is far from his or her mind, so I take this as a weak statement in a Biblical context. The Apostle Paul and other epistle writers emphasize obedience and heaven as cure for suffering and struggle.

The rich do not suffer as do the poor, but I believe everyone hurts in struggles through life. James relates that they engage in more blasphemy than the rest of us, an unforgivable sin when Spirit is the subject or object.

James heads from blasphemy to neighborly relations. The Hebrew Scriptures speak to neighborly relations, especially in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the Psalms and Proverbs, and Jeremiah. The messages are usually negative: a behavior is forbidden, or punishment for an infraction is delineated.

The epistle writer tells us that when one sins in judging others, he or she brings down the whole law. The assertion is in consonance with other texts, though Jesus' teaching about keeping the Sabbath fuzzes up what James is saying and findings by other authorities.

I find the words problematic, since only a very few of us get through a day without breaking God's Law. Accountability

for sin seven times a week? If so, how many of us need to adapt our method and mechanism of penance?

The reading continues after passing by verses on adultery and murder. The epistle writer insists that believers offer clothes and food to the needy, that charity and other works must complement faith. Add prayer and fasting, and the three form works that Jesus teaches to keep to oneself.

That faith alone is not enough does not evoke an easy answer. I conclude that when one has faith, he or she accomplishes works. I remember the passage about the widow in the temple who was full of faith, and I was curious about her works. On checking I found "a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."

James rails against judging, as do nearly all of his predecessors. He commends impartiality and Jesus' teaching on mercy and works.

The Savior takes a trip to Tyre and secretes himself to engage in private works, assumedly to pray. A woman with sick daughter seeks Him, and the Lord helps her. She was a foreigner with unclean daughter, two strikes against her from a Jew's perspective.

Would the daughter have been healed if mother had fear and lacked faith?

Christ's command to feed the other children brought new vision, out of touch with the signs of the times. Greek and Jewish societies with high infant mortality and demand for labor were not sentimental about infants and youth. When kids were too young for employment, they were the "least among" people in Jesus' time. Jesus' sympathy for the young compares weakly with more ancient literature.

Luke 42:009:048 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

One of the Jesus' apostles sees children as the model of discipleship.

Continuing the holy travels, somewhere near the Sea of Galilee, the "They" of the story did not accept Jesus' model of discipleship.

When the Lord and his cadre halted the journey, hearing was sought for a deaf-mute. Jesus obliges after taking the man to a private place where he offered the charity of healing. I see faith by the crippled man, and, and by those gathered (in smaller proportion), as necessary for the

healing. If he had been fearful, would speech and hearing have been restored?

Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus does as he says, keeping his instructions for privacy in prayer, fasting, and charity. The group of followers shows no fear in ignoring instructions to them to keep the faith and remain silent.

In my reading on faith this week, the authorities I read seemed unable to explain how the believer grows his or her faith. I was a little disappointed to find their responses relied on divine instruction, the receipt of which takes time. In other words, keep at it, and more faith descends upon the righteous student.

Part of the faith journey is cognitive processing of disbelief. How does one return to a lesson or teaching when what is seen and heard hugely contradicts and seemingly displaces what one is taught or wants to believe? Paradox engaged the philosophers of Antiquity and the rationalists of the Enlightenment, but they have no answer beyond A and Not A is logically impossible.

Faith returns after dislocation as the seeker finds the way to resolution through growth. The amount of time this takes is undefined—always taking longer than one hopes. The

idea is false that any paradox or contradiction can be made to go away.