

Proper 17b: 9/2/18
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*“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers
who deceive themselves...”*

Thank you for being here today – on a holiday weekend, no less.
Of all the places you could be (including still in bed),
thank you for making the choice and the effort to be here.
It’s important to be here together on this and every Sunday.
So thank you. Thanks be to God *for* you.

Having said that, and meant it sincerely,
here’s something else I feel just as strongly:
Sunday is not the only time of the week we practice our faith.
This beautiful church is not the only place we worship God.

Yes, our time together here is essential.
Among other things, it equips us to live our faith outside these walls
every day, every moment, of our lives.

We get *there* by being here. Together.
Praising God’s word made flesh in Jesus;
studying God’s word in holy scripture;
interpreting God’s word still speaking today.

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers...”

That’s a line from today’s epistle, our second reading,
from the letter of James, brother of Jesus.
You might think of it as a type of Christian “wisdom” literature.

Here in the opening of his book James reminds us that

every perfect gift is from above –
 every moment, every encounter, every challenge –
 all invitations to share the love of God here below.
 All opportunities to put God's word into action.

“Be ye doers of the word not hearers only ...”
 That's the old-fashioned translation of this passage.
 And it's that version that's plastered all over my sister's church
 in Richmond – *St. James'*, Richmond.

If you watched John McCain's funeral yesterday,
 you saw the former rector of that church, Randy Hollerith,
 now Dean of the National Cathedral.
 He did my niece's wedding a couple of years ago, and
 baptized most of my grandnephews.
 I'm used to seeing him not on TV
 but standing in the *St. James'* chancel under an arch
 with wording that says – you guessed it –
 “Be ye doers of the word not hearers only.”

I get the value of being immersed in that saying every Sunday
 while hearing the word proclaimed.
 But if I ruled the world, do you know where I'd put it?
 Over the doors leading *out* of church.
 Let them be the last thing we see as we go out to our everyday lives.

In a sense we already do that, don't we?
 In the dismissal when we say,
 “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!”

Every time we say that (with or without “alleluias!”)
 we promise one other that,
 having been together hearing God's word,

we'll go out to be doers of that word.
We'll each share that word in our own way with others.

This week, guaranteed, you'll find yourself in a situation
(or perhaps many situations)
that need a "word of truth", as James says.

You may "do" the word this week in something as simple as a smile.
Or maybe you'll "do" the word by holding your tongue.
Or by speaking a hard truth – or receiving one.
Maybe you'll make a tough decision.
Stretch yourself to try something new or uncomfortable.
Give money or time to something or someone who needs it.
Maybe you'll forgive – maybe even yourself?

In that moment, by the grace of God,
chances are you'll do what needs to be done.
You'll do the work God has given you to do.

You won't do it to get God's attention or favor.
(You already have that by grace.)

You'll do it because you've heard the word of God here, together,
you've experienced the word of God here
in so many different ways.
Because, deep down, you know that God created us
not to be passive hearers of the word, but doers –
people, beloved by God, who *do stuff*
that mirrors God's love for the world.

At various times we have folks stand up to commission them for
specific roles at church – choristers or vestry or new staff or whatever.
It's a good thing to do.

I think of our blessings for “birthdays, anniversaries and life’s milestones” in a similar way – commissioning/empowering people to view whatever they’re celebrating as an occasion for ministry.

In recent years we’ve sometimes taken this Sunday before Labor Day to commission us ALL for the various and sundry work we do in the world.

So, may I ask you to please stand?

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, thank you for bringing us in safety to this new day full of possibilities.

Thank you for bringing us together here in this wondrous space.

We ask for your blessing upon us now, and always in our daily life and work –

paid work in offices, studios, warehouses, factories, labs or wherever your people make their daily bread;

the work of students and teachers at school;

priceless volunteer work;

the work of caring for loved ones and homes;

the work of being good neighbors,

and good citizens of this world you so love.

May we preach your gospel of love and mercy and justice at all times

in all places

in all the work you give us to do.

I hereby and humbly commission us to these our labors

in the name of God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. AMEN.