



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

June 19, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Joshua 5:13-6:5, 20](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 142

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [James 1:2-12](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 7:1-10](#)

The Believer Has Faith to... Trust God's Power and Persevere

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Did you ever notice how men and women are a little different, different as a generalization? I know it's not true in every case. Women seem to be much more about relations, relationships and more concerned about that. Men seem to be more concerned about activity. I think it shows up in a couple of different ways. One way it shows up is I think if you go back every year since I've been here, on Mother's Day there is a big spike in attendance. Why do you think that is? Moms are worried about relationships. They want people to be close to Jesus like they are. I'm not saying dads don't, but I think dads are more worried about activity and things like that at times.

Today (Father's Day) we maybe have a few more people, but I don't think it's quite the same as Mother's Day. Do you think I'm being judgmental? Do you think that's fair? You haven't looked at the statistics—what do you know? I'm telling you—that is the way it works.

I think I see this in my relationship with people now since I've announced I've got this surgery coming up to take out my kidney and all this stuff. I've had people come up and encourage me and things like that, which is wonderful. Every single woman who has come up to me is asking how I'm doing and things like that. I have a couple of friends who are male. I have one especially who calls me up every week and says, "How come they're not moving the surgery up, pastor? Why are they making you wait so long? Why aren't they doing...?" He never says it, but the implied thing is "If this was

me, I'd be raising a ruckus. You should be raising a ruckus to get this fixed"—which is what men seem to like to do.

Well, I try to tell him but he doesn't always listen. I try to tell him I'm not so worried about getting things fixed and moving the surgery around because I'm pretty comfortable, not with what I do but with what I am. What I am, as I face surgery, as I face a trial or a difficulty, a trouble, something to persevere through and get through, is a child of God. I'm loved by my Savior, who came into the world and lived and died in my place to take away not just the guilt of the sins of the whole world but to take away my sins. If my God loved me enough to do that, I think He can love me enough to help me through surgery if I have to wait until the end of the month. That's okay. I don't need to fix that.

I think when we're going through trials, difficulties, and suffering sometimes we worry more about our verb, what we can do and what we can do to fix things than we do our noun, what we are. I'm a Christian. You're a Christian. What does that mean? A Christian trusts God. A Christian has faith in God—faith in what they can't see. That means we have faith that God has the power and God has the wisdom and God has the knowledge to see far beyond what you and I can see and He can keep His promise to work all things for the good of those who love Him, even if you and I can't see how He is going to do it right now and right here. That's faith. It's not something I'm going to be certain about but it's something you and I have to trust that God has that power to do it. I think that's exactly what James is talking about today as he writes to these people.

Right at the start of his letter he starts out with his greeting in Verse 1. Then in Verse 2 he has to say something that the people that are reading this must think *this guy is nuts!* **Consider it pure joy**, when you win the lottery, when you have a windfall? No, when you have struggles, **whenever you face trials of many kinds**. Consider that joy. That sounds ridiculous because you and I are used to our joy being dependent upon our outward circumstances.

Two weeks ago was Wes' wedding, a day of joy. You see your son get married to the love of his life and it fills your heart with joy. That's understandable for us. I stand in St. John's Lutheran Church in Hemlock, Michigan and walk into a pulpit with my hands shaking to preach for my mother's funeral—joy, because it's not dependent upon the outward circumstances. Joy of knowing that my mom is looking at Jesus and those poor folks are stuck looking at me. Joy in knowing that God has kept His promise to take her to her heavenly home. That's what we, as Christians, can have—joy that is not dependent on outward circumstances.

So when we're going through suffering and trial and persecution and difficulty, things that trouble us that we have to persevere through, James is really telling us, take your eyes off yourself and put them on your God. Focus on His power and His promise that

He is going to rule over everything for the benefit of the Church—for the eternal good of His people, not the earthly happiness. When we're in the midst of trial and suffering and difficulty, even when we're just in the midst of everyday life, we can become (as sinful people on this side of heaven) more concerned about our earthly happiness than it hurts our eternal good. We can do that because we say "I've got to do this; this and this, and I don't have time to be close to Jesus." Then when the trials come, we aren't going to be ready to face them because we haven't had our eyes on Jesus and we're going to try to fix things all by ourselves or get through them all by ourselves, and that isn't going to work. We need the power and the love that a God has for us, who loved us enough to die for us, to be at our side during these difficulties. So ***consider it pure joy*** when you are going through suffering, when it helps you to focus on just how much you need your God and how willing He is to help you. That's James' point.

But James doesn't tell us it is easy. He says if you're struggling with that, ask God to give you wisdom. What is "wisdom?" Wisdom is taking the knowledge that you have—like as Christians, you and I know that God has promised that He'll make all things work for the good of those who love Him. [\(Romans 8:28\)](#) You and I have head knowledge of that. We've heard that passage. That's the knowledge. The "wisdom" that you're asking God for is that you take that knowledge that God has put into your head and apply it to the situation when needed. You take that knowledge and put it into practice, not afterwards but when it's needed; the wisdom to apply knowledge at the right time in the right way. God knows that when we're going through trials and sufferings and difficulties, we are going to need wisdom to trust in His power because we're going to focus at times on only what we can see because that's natural for us. So we need the wisdom to have the Spirit remind us to focus on God. That's what James is talking about here.

This is a struggle for us. You and I are going to fail at it at times. That's when we need to have brothers and sisters in Christ around us who point us back to these truths because God didn't design us to be an island. He designed us to encourage one another; 60 "one another" passages in the New Testament! God is trying to get it through our heads that we are supposed to be concerned about one another. We are supposed to encourage one another. It's not a "have to." This is a "get to." And this is what God has called us to do because He knows we can hide the struggles we are going through from each other, but God knows them. That's why He tells us to be concerned about our brothers and sisters in Christ and encourage them and be worried about them and speak to them the comforting message of Jesus. That's what He calls us to. But that takes faith to trust in God's power.

You and I are probably more inclined to trust in another source of power at times, aren't we? When we're sick, it's if we can only find the right doctor. When we're struggling financially, it's if only Publisher's Clearing House would show up with one of those giant checks, then everything would be wonderful. This is how we are. We at times look to other things for our source of power, and James talks about it. He talks to those who

are in humble circumstances that don't have a lot of resources. He talks to those who are rich and have many resources. What he is saying is, if you're in humble circumstances, don't worry about this stuff. Put your trust in God. Think about your high position. Find comfort in your high position when you are in lowly circumstances. What's that? It's that God loves you enough to call you His child. God sent Jesus to live and die for you. He loves you THAT much. That's your high position.

And those of you, who are rich, think about this with humility. Didn't he say something like that? You have nothing to offer God in and of yourself. God gave you those blessings as a gift of grace, not because He owed them to you. Don't think too highly of yourself, but remember your low position. Remember that we have nothing to offer to God, yet God has given us everything. That's what he is saying to both groups, isn't he? How does this show up?

This past week, Tuesday and Wednesday, we were at a district convention at Fox Valley Lutheran High School for the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod. One of the things we talked about—two things actually jumped out at me as I was listening to this, and yes, I did listen. Two things had jumped out at me.

One is that the Wisconsin Synod, our church body, has been declining over the years since it peaked (I don't remember back when). The missions that we have established, the mission bodies that we are in fellowship with around the world, they are growing. They are at about 300,000 and we're slightly above that as a church body right now. It kind of looks like within a few years our mission fields are going to be bigger as a whole than the Wisconsin Synod. That kind of jumped out at me.

The second thing that jumped out at me—we talked about the shortage of Called Workers; the shortage of teachers, the shortage of pastors and how this is something that is a challenge for going forward, especially when we want to try to open one hundred new missions in ten years. I think it's a wonderful goal. I'm just wondering who is going to staff it.

Then I heard this statistic, which jumped off the page at me as I was thinking about that. This past year at our seminary in Mequon, our church body graduated 26 men who stood as candidates for the pastoral ministry. In our mission fields, we had 3-4 times as many people graduate from their seminaries to enter the pastoral ministry; a smaller group of people, 3-4 times as many people going into the pastoral ministry. It makes me wonder why?

As I read James, I think about humble circumstances and prosperity, of being blessed. I heard stories about some of our brothers and sisters in Christ in Africa that walked three miles to get water for the day. I'll take \$5.00 per gallon gas over walking three miles for water for the day. That's what (gas prices) we're all worried about, right? We're kind of

blessed. Yet in those places we see more and more entering into the service of the kingdom because as you face these kinds of trials and these kinds of difficulties, I think your eyes get more squarely focused on God. When you are struggling with some of the problems we have, we think we can fix them as opposed to trusting in God's power to help us persevere through our troubles because we are more affluent. That's a blessing from God. It's not that it's wrong. It's just that we need to keep it in that perspective. Isn't that what James said? If you have those blessings, use them with humility and recognize they are a gift from God and say, "How does God want me to use all these gifts?" This is what our God is calling us to do. This is what He is laying before us.

As we do all of this, as we keep our focus on God in spite of all the things that Satan wants to use to take it away from us, we are reminded of God's great love. But we're reminded that it is His love that helps us persevere.

The end of what James said in what I read to you sounded a little bit like the letters to the seven churches, didn't it? Did that kind of strike you as that when he says, "**Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**" It sounds just like what we read in the seven letters to the seven churches. There are going to be trials. There are going to be difficulties. But when you and I focus on Christ, we will overcome them and we will persevere; not because we have done this but because God, in His mercy and His grace, has put the Spirit into our hearts to give us faith, and faith trusts God's power to persevere (when it's at its best). And when you and I, as weak, sinful people forget that, we need our brothers and sisters in Christ to point us back to it and tell us that Jesus died for that sin as well because that's what builds our faith; this love that our Savior has for us. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.