

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 29, 2021

Got Religion?

By Daniel H. Wilcox

James 1:17-27

1:17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

1:18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

1:19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;

1:20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

1:21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

1:22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

1:23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror;

1:24 for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.

1:25 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.

1:26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.

1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Karl Marx argues that religion is the “opium of the masses” deluding and distorting humanity and its society through its faith practices. However, Marx actually unwittingly affirms the validity of religion in his critique while questioning the quality and value of religious practices. The definite concern is the character and nature of religion expressed, revealing its authenticity and adherence.

The writer of James challenges believers to contend with spiritual and social imperatives of faith as expressed in religion. When religion is defined as pure and undefiled, the responsibility is to bring in sync private belief and public practice. Religion should exhibit care for the orphans and widows who are deemed vulnerable or disadvantaged and concern for holy action that is uncorrupted by interaction with a polluted world. In Methodism, John Wesley proclaims that there is no holiness but social holiness. Thus, true Christians are concerned about salvation of person, community, and creation. Christianity is a faith that can be acquired privately but must be practiced publicly. Authentic religion evokes genuine spiritual pursuit of holiness and relentless social advocacy for the vulnerable.

Let us religiously adore and obey God through social practices and spiritual praxis that love God and neighbor.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)— Reflecting on the scripture, share a time/instance when you sought holiness and social advocacy as guiding principles. How did this experience make you feel or direct you?

PRAY: God of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: grant in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Ghost, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Adaption from The Book of Common Prayer

ACT:

1. During the Kingdomtide season, discuss with a small group the ethical value of taking the COVID-19 vaccine as a spiritual and social imperative. Journal your experience and reflect on your spiritual journey. Do what you can to protect the health of others and yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, and prayerfully considering getting the vaccine when it is available—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

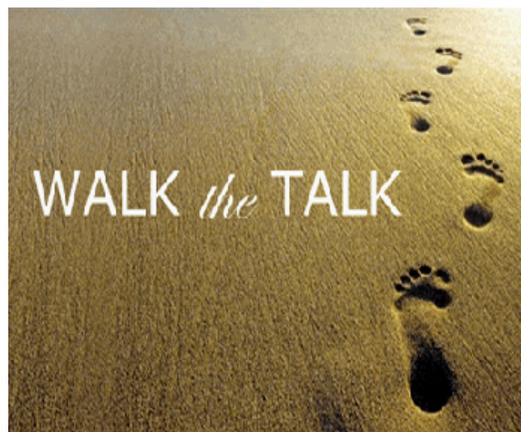
Song:

O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee
AMEC Hymnal, #299

1. O Master, let me walk with Thee,
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.
2. Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear, winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay,
And guide them in the homeward way.
3. Teach me Thy patience; still with Thee
In closer, dearer, company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong.
4. In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the future's broadening way,
In peace that only Thou canst give,
With Thee, O Master, let me live.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.