

Nothing's Wrong
James 1:1-18
Beloved Community series
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First Church Westfield
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Okay, first off: *I don't like this Scripture passage.* Or at least the first half or more. "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." Bleah... Pure joy, yeah, right. I don't think so, James. "One who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord." Well, excuse me, James. I'm a human being. I have a body and I have a mind. And a mind is a mind of doubt and faith. That's the way I see it. I can doubt without losing all faith. I can have faith that is tainted with a bit of doubt and fear. So, am I worse than any other "believer?" I don't think so. Is James dismissing all of us who lose heart, who would prefer that things go our way, who love God, but want the sun to shine most of the time? I don't know.

But what I do know is that it is easy to lose heart. It is common and (dare I say it?) universal to get tired, weary, anxious and see hope drain out of our minds and souls. It is natural to want to withdraw, isolate, become a little cynical and less joyful than those "other times," when we sing, "Oh what a beautiful morning?" I do know that in our personal lives, as well as in the public square, it is so easy to think about "the good 'ol days," to wish for better times, easier lives, more love, more light (like, anyone glad the sun is shining today?), more connection and the reassurance of more peace. I do know all this. What possible good can James be telling us in this Scripture?

Here's my best take: *Do the best you can.* Do the best you can to stay positive, to not lose hope, to keep the faith and to continue to celebrate life and what is good in the world. Do your best, people of God. How?

Declare your faith. Even if you don't necessarily believe it at the time, declare your faith, your trust in a good outcome, your love of and faith in a God that is *good* and *just*.

Count on those who love you. Don't isolate. The people who love you are not perfect. Your faith community is truly imperfect. But don't use that as an excuse to run away, self-destruct, or make things even worse. Reach out. Cry if you need to. Keep affirming your faith but cry and share how you are feeling. Then wash your face and keep going. Never, ever think that you are alone. Never, ever feel that you have to face your difficulties without support and caring. This is the church, my friends. This is your family. These are your friends. When shadows close in on you, and thoughts of your aloneness and hopelessness encroach, don't believe it. Get a second opinion, a third, and a fourth. Share, share, share.

Remember, "This, too, shall pass." It wasn't long ago the sun was shining. It wasn't long ago you were laughing. It wasn't long ago you were reassuring another, telling them not to lose

hope. Remember, all things must pass. Cling to the knowledge that you are loved, that God loves you, and that the sun will soon shine again.

Know that this is not personal. Don't say, "Why me?" Understand, "Of course, me." If you were not up to this adversity, it would not have befallen you. This is true of individuals and true of groups of individuals. It is true of nations.

We are in a dark time. We see division, deception, exclusion and harmful speech. We see devious and sinister plotting to win at all costs. We see suspicion and an unwillingness to be open, forgiving or high-minded.

In our personal lives we may be experiencing loss or turmoil. We may see trees instead of people walking around (Mark 8:24). That means that healing is on its way but we just can't see it right now. As Paul says in 1st Corinthians 13, we see through a glass darkly. We will see clearly. We will know peace. We must keep hope alive. If not for ourselves, for those around us, for those who come after us.

I want you to feel God's love today. I want you to express your love to others. I want you to know that we all have trials. We all have temptations. The wheel goes round and round, my friends. But let's declare today that "Nothing's wrong." Life is life. And God is forever. God has your back. We have one another's. A new day is dawning. Believe it, dear ones. Believe it.