

September 6, 2009  
Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church

James 2:1-10, 14-17  
Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

### ***HOW'S YOUR HEART?***

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23: “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all. He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed. A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor. Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them.” This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

As we hear the texts from James and Proverbs, it is again important to express thanks to God for the continued generosity of this congregation. A remarkable sense of mission at home and abroad has always been a vital part of the history of MPC since 1858. The Spirit of the Lord is upon this people, leading you to respond with heart and hand to the needs of Christ's beloveds around the world. And your compassion begins at home.

When life throws lemons at a member of MPC, you become Mother and Papa Goose, making lemonade of food, visits, cards, transportation, and above all, prayer.//When New Hope Ministries and Ecumenical Food Pantry indicated their shelves were bare (and they are bare again), it was as if there was an “energizer bunny” food manufacturer in the basement of this edifice producing hundreds of pounds of foods and necessities.//Children in the Mechanicsburg and Harrisburg area who would have begun this school year without the basics of pencils and paper were blessed by your generosity. Why? Because you know the importance of education to nurture the mind and heart of every child and adult, and you desire that every person thrive with a healthy sense of self-esteem.//Confused minds and angry hearts of men incarcerated at Camp Hill Prison are reading God's Good News for them because you have joined the ministry of the Men's Bible Study Group.//There is a relentless passion for mission that supports those who serve as missionaries, our youth and adults who spend weeks in mission witness, and those who have repaired more homes in the Mechanicsburg-Harrisburg area than they can count.//You are remarkable! But can we move it up another notch?

Everything which has been mentioned and other ministries known only to God are essential to the Kingdom. We cannot stop doing them. But are our hearts moved to change attitudes in the world community? There is a great need for “the holy catholic church” to be an intentional example, a voice, a prayer-warrior, an advocate for love and equality, justice and peace, self-worth and hope for all people. It is one thing to know the words of Jesus and the prophets, and the Ten Commandments in our heads. But is there devotion to God and love for all people strong enough to pray,

speak and act in ways that glorify God, and, in faith example and prayer, challenge the attitudes and actions of government, institutions, businesses, and yes, even the church?

The text from James and the wisdom of King Solomon are timely for present conditions in our state, nation and world. Too many politicians bicker, filibuster, and sell their souls to the highest paying lobbyists. Heads of corporations are greedy without conscience. A dangerous, marginalized few explode in murderous anger and rage to gain a little food and lot of drugs. In the words of singer and inspirational speaker Chonda Pierce, "This Ain't Prettyville." Church and society stand guilty before our loving God because the ears of many hearts have turned deaf to the "royal law," "Love your neighbor as yourself." Yet, Christ's Great Commandment to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," comes before the "royal law"...and both are to be fulfilled with total devotion. When people do not honor God, lying, cheating, and abusing others, especially the marginalized poor, are and have been a given since Adam and Eve. From childhood, people have learned a scale of respect based upon clothing, profession, race, health, "social polish," and wealth. When Mr. Madoff and others "made-off" with millions of dollars of the rich and famous, they who once rudely judged, abused, and shunned others, now see life from the bottom up. Such dismissive arrogance even occurs in the context of church life. Hear a true experience of one young man we will call Joshua.

A colleague in ministry had asked Joshua to attend an annual meeting of the ministers of his denomination. After one evening session a group of fifty was invited to join one of the denominational administrators for a time of conversation in his suite. Several hotel employees were present, wearing their hotel uniforms and serving coffee, soft drinks, and cookies. (With that, you know *it was not* a Presbyterian gathering). Joshua noticed there were not enough hotel employees to cover all the tasks, so he began to pour soft drinks into glasses for the guests. Something about his suit must have made it appear that he was the supervisor of the hotel workers. A distinguished-looking guest approached, and Joshua served him. He treated Joshua in the brusque, inhuman fashion that anyone who has worked in the service sector knows all too well. Joshua attempted to engage the man in conversation, but with a dismissive glance he simply walked away.

Soon after, the gathering was called to order and formed a large circle to begin discussion. Along with several others, Joshua arranged his chair behind the larger circle and found himself behind the man he had served. The host, commenting upon the sermon they had all heard a few minutes before, then said, "Let us begin our discussion by hearing the opinion of our resident 'New Testament' specialist." The host turned and looked at Joshua. As the man in front turned and realized that Joshua was the "New Testament" specialist, his visage fell and his skin paled. Afterward, he approached Joshua, and without any reference to their earlier non-interchange, spoke

in tones that were kind and flattering.

The man judged Joshua's status according to standards of culture, and thus failed to honor the will of God. In his mind, a "New Testament" specialist is to be accorded more honor than an employee in a hotel. **Not on God's watch!**

Beloved of the Lord, this is the kind of hypocrisy James condemns and Solomon admonishes. This is the disgrace of our world society in which faulty beliefs about God lead to faulty decisions about people. God is no respecter of persons. God is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all...without partiality.

Bullies in school, demeaning co-workers, garbage on the internet held as truth, hotel supervisors who will check rooms to make sure you have not stolen something from the room, but will steal tips left for the hotel room workers... any...any attitude that questions the value of another human being must be seen for what it is: an affront to our loving God.

As we move our living and doing of the Word up another notch on the ladder of faith, let us be among God's witnesses "who will not bow a knee to the world's Baals or kiss his feet." As we face the challenges of "times like these," may we be living witnesses to the truth that God is everywhere God sends the church to serve. And that is everywhere, and in every situation of life on this planet. Because God is who God is: God's grace is immeasurable; God's mercy is inexhaustible; and God's peace is inexpressible.

So, let us arise on the breath of dawn: Singing praises like the cardinal; showering love like a gentle rain on parched souls; speaking peace and justice in a voice of hope; lending a hand with hammers, nails, and a listening ear; setting captives - rich and poor - free; proclaiming, teaching and honoring the self-worth of every child and adult; and being Christ's reason that many sing: "And now let the weak say "I am strong," let the poor say "I am rich," because of what the Lord has done for us. Give thanks, give thanks, give thanks...and be the reason that others do the same. Amen and Amen.