

What a Mess!
Matthew 22:36-39 and James 1:17-25
29 August 2021

You know, I think I need to let you **in** on something... something that's going **on** here at Bon Air Church: God... is **messing** with you! Yeah – it's true! First of all, by **bringing** you to this church. (Yes, in spite of what you may think, it really is God who has gotten you here.) And then, by **exposing** you here to the scripture and the sacraments... **and** to some pretty **salty** saints... to the body of Christ God has gathered here... to the way these people **care** for one another... and the kind of ministries they like to be involved in.

God is messing with **you**... **giving** you a certain self-understanding... a particular self-image...**hoping** you will think of yourselves in **God's** way, **rather** than in ways you may have picked up elsewhere in the world...where we're **largely** taught to think of ourselves as **consumers**... whose **worth** is measured on the basis of what we buy and own... or of what we **can't** buy and don't have... or, where some would have us think of ourselves as **expendable** – merely cannon fodder or Covid prey... as beings, **barely** worth the salt we're **made** of... or, where things conspire to **convince** us that we're simply victims, disempowered **victims** who can't do a thing to help ourselves... who just have to **take** whatever gets thrown our way.

I believe **God** wants you to see yourselves in **other** ways than **these**.

Every week, in this and other churches, people like **you** hear people like **me** calling them *Beloved of God... children of God... God's own people*. They **hear** things like *You are forgiven and set free*. They **hear** that they're *the salt of the earth... the light of the world...* leaven in the lump... precious in God's sight – red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in God's sight! They hear that they are *members of the body of Christ... a chosen people... a royal priesthood... servants of the Most High God...* that they are *Christ's hands and feet...* a **means** God has chosen to **meet** others with mercy... a **way** through which God brings grace to bear upon creation and makes light to shine in this often dark world.

Every week **you** hear such things. You hear that you are **called** to undertake a **mission** God has given you uniquely... that you're **gifted** by the **Spirit** for that work precisely... and that you're **promised** Holy **help** for doing it faithfully. You **hear** these things in this church. And it's **not** just me or Joslyn or Connor going *blah, blah, blah*. No, I'm certain there **is** something of the **Holy One** in it. It is, foundationally, **God** working upon you... God seeking to **influence** how you **see** yourselves... **understand** yourselves. It is the Lord of all being trying to help you recognize your identity, your capabilities, your responsibilities and your possibilities.

Now, **please**, do not imagine that our Lord **engages** with us in this way simply to **amuse** himself (though I **suppose** that **some** of the ways we **react** to God's effort may **well** tickle God's funny bone!). But what God is after is making a **difference** in our lives, **and** in the lives of others **through** us... a **gracious** difference. God **truly** wants to **see** us... and others...**free** from the **choking** grip of fear and guilt... see us **free**... and at peace with **God**... reconciled with one **another**... hopeful about our **future**...and engaged in faithful discipleship.

And **so**, God **messes** with us... seeking to put **transformational** powers into play...

looking to alter the ways we face and approach things – our troubles, our blessings, what we plan for the future... working to influence **how** we live and for **whom** we live.

If we **truly listen** to God's counsel... not like background music at our workplace... but as we would listen to the words of a **lover**... taking in **each** phrase, reflecting on each **thought**, cherishing every **bit** of wisdom we can glean from God... it **will** affect how we understand ourselves, profoundly.

But, even **more** than **listening** to God, **acting in response** to what God's communicating really **cements** those positive changes... which is why **James** tells us to *Be **doers** of the word and not **hearers** only.*

Say you **hear** me tell you that *In Christ your sin has been forgiven; that in Christ you are now free* to live with gratitude and hope. You **hear** this... and you **think** about it; and you recognize that it has been a **long time** since you actually **felt** much gratitude or hope. As a matter of fact, life **has** been hard and so often disappointing. You've been **denied**. You've suffered **setbacks**. You've tried and failed so many times that you've pretty much **lost the will** to try again. And, you're fairly **convinced** that it's pointless to **hope**.

But now you hear **Christ** telling you that it's **not** pointless. Christ says that you **can** hope. You are **free** to hope **again**... because **he** has declared that you are free and he has thrown open the door... because he is at work in your life... and because he is the **source** of all the hope you'll ever **need**.

And so, you say, *By God, I **will** hope and try again! My Lord loves me. He is powerful and present; and **through** him I can do **anything** he calls me to. And right now he is calling me to hope!*

And so, you **do**. You **risk** hoping once again. You **try**... once **again**... in hope.

And **do** you succeed? Well, at **last**, it seems **you do**; though in your **heart** you know that your **success** has **come** because of Christ. And **so**, you're thankful, too – completely **full** of gratitude. You come **alive** with gratitude and hope! You rise up and get going. You **take on** the ministry God's given you to do.

Hear the word of truth today, and *Be doers of the word*, James says, *and **not** hearers only*... so that God, **through** the word God's imparting to you today, **may** make a gracious difference in **your** life... and, **through** you, in the lives of **others**.

So, yes... today, as usual, our Lord is messing with us: **Telling** us, *You **are** forgiven – and urging us to **live** forgiven! **Saying** to us, *You are children of God – so climb on up here and play with me! **Urging** Bon Air Church to *Keep your eyes, ears and hearts open to me... because I have plans for you, Bon Air... **plans** to **abundantly** bless you and to bless the lives of others through you. And I am just **about** ready to bring you in on them. **You** are just **about** ready to **receive** them in faith and to take them on in love. You are just about ready to **join** me in some really lovely messy business! So, keep your eyes, ears and hearts open to me. And, believe me, mine are **assuredly** open to you.***

So, **don't** mess up... without me!