

Just Do It!

Psalm 15 James 1:17-27

I wonder if there is anyone in the modern world who is unfamiliar with the motto, “Just Do It”? Great marketing can catch our attention and, in turn, get us to spend, and that motto is an example of great marketing.

At one time in recent history the brand was Acosta. Then it was Ralph Lauren. Along the way, others have come and gone, some with more staying power than their rivals. In today’s world, there are numerous brands of sport and sport/leisure wear but undoubtedly two of the largest are the three stripes...and the swoosh. It’s not necessarily about quality, mind you, but about visibility.

You can always tell when a brand is high profile when even the parodies of the brand sell well! But for our purposes today, I am going to appropriate the Nike motto for a higher calling. Along the way today I am also going to share some pet peeves as well, so you can “fast-forward” those sections, if you wish.

Throughout my life I have been always been struck by people who comment something like this: “I’ve always wanted to...”

Now before I go much further, let me be perfectly clear on this; the key word here is “want” NOT “should”. There is an enormous difference between saying “I SHOULD do something” and “I WANT to do something”!

Try it out for yourself: “I SHOULD make dinner” vs. “I WANT to make dinner”. Which one energizes you? Which one make you look for anything else to do? “I SHOULD learn to play golf” or “I WANT to learn to play golf.” Which one is more motivated?

I suspect most of us have had times when we get stalled out on this; having a list of “should dos” versus a list of “want to dos”. But I guess that this really isn’t new.

James, Jesus’ brother and leader of the early church addresses this in his small letter that we heard from today. It would be easy to listen to this reading and hear it as negative, but that would be to miss the point.

James addresses a common human frailty; the incredible ability we have to fool ourselves. In that, we are no different than the good church folk to whom James wrote.

Now this gets to be very personal!

It's far too easy to SAY we are followers of Christ but not LIVE as followers of Christ. It is far too easy to be hearers of the word and not doers. James knew that. WE know that. But...

So, let's go back to the text and see what James has to share:
"Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

To reinforce this idea of gratitude, James used the metaphor of a mirror. Imagine a mirror that reflects back to the viewer all of God's grace, love, peace, and joy that have been working in and through a person's life, the fullness of a person's salvation in Christ.

The absolutely wrong response would be to turn away from that mirror and immediately forget what we saw in the mirror. The appropriate response instead would be to have our lives changed, inspired and enriched by what we saw and then to live in grateful response to express that gratitude outwardly. The first is made up of "should" ...I should do this or should do that. The problem with should is that it is easily forgotten or ignored when we turn away.

If our response is to have any meaning at all, it must be a matter of "want", so that in turning away we find ourselves wanting to make a difference, wanting to better live out our faith.

But there is more to James' letter here. Not only should expressing our faith emanate from gratitude for God's blessings, it will lead to further blessings: "being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing."

This is important:

James does not subscribe to the notion that blessings come to those who wait, or that there is virtue in simply "letting go and letting God". Far from it!

Those are greeting card sentiments and are a long way from the message of James. Instead, James endorses an active faith.

This is NOT a challenge to salvation by faith rather than works, instead it is the body of work that comes as a result of that salvation, that faith. This is the stuff of our heroes from the Bible:

Abraham, who relocated his family to a far country and became the patriarch of a great people.

Moses, who boldly confronted Pharaoh and led the people of God to liberation.

Esther, whose risk-taking sacrifice saved her people from massacre,
David, whose remembrance of God's past saving activity empowered him to slay a giant.

Mary, who courageously said yes to God and became a blessing to the world by giving birth to the Messiah.

Time and time and time again, people of God have become blessings to others through their willingness to obey God, regardless of the sacrifice or the cost.

This is most fully expressed and embodied through the example of Jesus Christ himself, who willingly gave His own life so that others might live. He became a blessing so that we, by living an active and open faith, can become, no, MUST become a blessing to others.

Our faith is an active faith. Full stop. There are no conditions on this. Saved by Grace, we respond with our works. Not hearers only, but doers of the word.

Of course, all of this then leads to the question, "What are you doing, and for whom?" Which is a lead in to one of my pet peeves: Doing mission for self rather than others.

Recently we were with a group of people and discussing, among other things, the horror of human trafficking. This person was a strong advocate for intervention and had lots of enthusiasm in working to shut down the pipeline that allows human beings to be sold.

HOWEVER

(That's a hint that the peeve is coming)

He is starting a program in Athens to work with refugees to attempt to limit the number of people entering the pipeline. Sounds good, right?

Yeah, but...

Sue and I have met folks who are already running a wonderful program doing just that in Athens. Why do we need a new one? Is there something wrong with the existing program? Or is it a matter of wanting your own program because it looks better that way, or you will receive credit that way? Who is the program for...those being served or your public profile?

Please don't misunderstand me; I am NOT against this ministry! Far from it. I think the church ABSOLUTELY MUST be involved with refugee work and in the struggle against this horrific, soul stealing evil called human trafficking.

However, what I cannot support is, unless there is a problem with existing programs, why start another? Why not support those in existence to allow them to do more and better work? Why not work together?

Do we NEED another building rented, administrative staff paid for, duplication of structure? Wouldn't we be better off supporting the programs that already exist with more people and more money to deal directly with the problem?

But, I guess, even though it irks me to the bottom of my soul, doing another program is better than doing nothing at all.

And that brings us back to James.

Today's message from James to the church of today is simple: Do something. Just do it. Proclaim and witness to your faith by the lives you lead and the actions you take.

Remember the list Jesus provided in Matthew 25? "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me".

So, hearers of the word, how are you going about being doers as well?

As a congregation, IPC has a pretty fair record. In recent history we have financed a medical lab in Central America, helped create an intensive care unit in a hospital in India, provided a full electronic school for the “trash children” of Managua, Nicaragua, provided funding for ministries to trafficked individuals, helped provide school materials for refugee children, provided “safe space” ministries for children in parts of war-torn Africa, and the list goes on. Pretty darn good.

We’ve done such hands-on work as building a facility for special needs individuals in Romania, rebuilt a playground for orphans and at-risk children, collected clothing and warm coats for those in need, held an annual food drive to provide supplies for a local soup kitchen...not bad.

As I speak we have individuals within the congregation who serve with Oasis, Nativitas, Serve the City, with sewing projects and service projects, visiting in prison and more. And that’s great!

But what are YOU doing? God has a call for you, places of service and work where you can put your faith into action.

We have a fairly small congregation; we don’t need to start a new ministry unless we discern a specific call for IPC. However, we DO have the ability to serve, and make a difference in that serving. Each and every one of us can graduate from being hearers of the word to becoming doers.

We can be making a difference in the lives of children, the elderly, the sick, the homeless, the imprisoned, those on the streets and those in the shelters by taking the risk of getting involved. Volunteers are always needed...or if your passion is not being addressed, start something! Just do it!

We can make a difference with the active prayer support for IPC, her missions and her ministries.

We can make a difference through the stewardship of our time and our treasurers.

YOU are being called to ministry! Are you ready?
Just do it!