

## **"Give me that old time religion"**

James 1:17-27

What is old time religion to you?

Several years ago we celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary of Duff's Presbyterian Church, the

church I served for the last 14 year. We all dressed up in late 19<sup>th</sup> century

clothing. I used a picture of the minister at the time – and I preached on

the sanctity of Sunday – observance of the Sabbath which was a hot topic

in the late 1800's. Is that old time religion?

When I was 18 years old I had a conversation with minister of the Christian

Reformed Church I grew up in. He said to me "Marty I am afraid for your

eternal soul – the lines you draw between the churches are far too light".

This was after I had mentioned to him that I was thinking of going to the

Presbyterian church. "Respectfully", I said to him, "yours are far too

heavy". Is this old time religion?

I grew up with an understanding of church doctrine summarized by the word "TULIP".

*T* was Total Depravity of all human beings and all creation.

*U* was Unconditional Love

*L* was Limited Atonement, and

*I* was Irresistible Grace

*P* was Perseverance of the Saints

In those years I heard a joke about heaven that I enjoyed very much.

Saint Peter was taking some newly arrived people on a tour of heaven

showing where the Anglicans were, the Presbyterians, the Roman Catholics

and so on. Then he told everyone to be quiet as they passed a closed

door. Once passed the door someone asked why it was important to be

quiet. "Well", said Peter, "that's where the Christian Reformed are and

they think they are the only ones up here" Is that old time religion?

Martin Luther was frustrated by the old time religion of his day. He

preached all about justification by faith alone; that works don't get you into

heaven; it is only by the grace of God that we are saved. His was a

reaction to the practices of the church at that time.

On the other hand, the author of the book of James says clearly "Be doers

of the word – not merely hearers". Faith means action – it means doing

Joy comes to us in  
the ordinary.

Every moment is a  
sacred moment. Every  
day is a blessing.

something. Luther called James an epistle of straw and he wanted it tossed out of the New Testament.

What is old time religion to you? Those of you who grew up in the Christian faith - what do you remember being taught as a child? Those of you who did not – what attracted you to the faith? What excites your heart – what is it about faith that inspires you, moves you?

Religion has been defined in many ways:

- A code of behavior

- List of beliefs

- A way of living

- A celebration of relationships

I like the writings of James – I don't think Martin Luther was fair to him. James begins by saying all gifts – everything comes from God. For James religion is recognizing the existence of God - that God is the Prime Mover in all; and we and all of creation are the recipients. But for James it doesn't end there. These incredible gifts by God if we see them, sense them, truly enter into them - they motivate us, goad, perturb, challenge, provoke, disturb and unsettle us – so that we respond with lives that have been transformed.

The key to transformation in my experience, and the experience of so many others, is to enter fully into relationships – with God, with each other, with the world all around including the environment.

There is power, deeply spiritual power in indigenous peoples' connection to the land. We need to learn from them. Relationships within families and communities that are deeply engaged – they too teach us something about religion – indeed about God. And in our own relationships with God those moments when even for a flickering in time God seems so real, so close, so present. Those relationships of fully connecting – that's the stuff of religion. That's the old time religion. That's still good enough for today. And in church, in this community we have the opportunity to practice it – to enjoy it – to learn from it and to develop our skills in deep relationship – with God, with others, with the land and all creation. So that we can go out into the community beyond our doors with the power of the old time religion – relationships!

And they will know we are Christians by our love  
Give me that old time religion – do you want some too?