

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 22
The Reverend John H. Brock

Sunday, August 30, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15
James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

You might have heard that the Brock family was on vacation last week. You might have heard that we went to Walt Disney World. This was not our "normal time" to go there. We usually go in January, when it's supposed to be warmer in central Florida than central Pennsylvania (although this was NOT the case this past January, when temperatures were WARMER in PA than they were in Orlando). This was our annual "the Brocks learn how to be a family again at the end of the summer after spending three months apart because Marianne and the boys have been at Camp Nawakwa all summer" trip. Other years we have gone to Cape Cod, or Boston; out to Chicago or New Hampshire; we have even gone camping in the Allegheny National Forest. But we recently joined the Disney Vacation Club, because, you know, we're in the midst of a recession and we wanted to help stimulate the economy.

So we're at Walt Disney World, in Orlando Florida, in August. Where it's hot. And humid. And there were lots of people there. Lots of interesting people there. And we saw lots of Parts of interesting people there, BECAUSE the weather was hot and humid, and people weren't wearing clothing that covered their entire bodies. We saw parts of interesting people that I could well have gone to my Grave without ever having needed to see. But now I am no longer that blessed, for I HAVE seen those parts.

I refer to tattoos and piercings, many times in places that I really did NOT need to know that this particular individual had that unique design on his or her body

Now I am going to speculate at this point, because the vast majority of these folk who were so, I'll say 'decorated,' appeared to be middle class, tended to be of European, descent, and Looked to be in the 20-40 year age range. In talking with people I know in that age range, who do have skin art and body modifications, I understand these folk are striving to stand out, to be individualists, all the while fitting in with their peers. I have pastor friends who are pierced and tattooed. Being someone, however, who is non-pierced, and without skin art (and WELL beyond that age bracket) I recognize that I don't necessarily understand the "why" (Although I have to say that my mother, my sister, my niece, and two of my nephews, all have pierced ears, and my niece has one of those nose things, which REALLY baffles me - so I know that piercings are NOT something limited to just this particular age bracket).

But I understand the *wanting to belong*, to fit in, to be part of a tribe, so to speak, to be able to recognize one another at just a glance.

Another part of our vacation involved the Disney resort itself. As I mentioned, the Brocks are now part of the Disney Vacation club. Without trying to sound like a commercial, basically we get X number of points each year that we can use toward housing on any Disney property. This time, we got to stay at Animal Kingdom Lodge. While at the store there in the lodge, I saw a

bunch of apparel and other items with some variation of "Disney Vacation Club" (or "DVC") logo on the item. There were shirts and jackets and t-shirts, along with those oval shaped magnets you can put on your car (like the ones that say "OBX" or "NWK"). There were also those white static cling decals that stick to your car window. The one that caught my eye was one of those white static ones that said: "Disney Vacation Club Member." And I thought the white lettering would look really cool against the dark blue background of my car. And of course all these things cost something. The jackets were \$60; the polo shirts were \$45; the t-shirts were \$20. And these decal things were \$9. And while I'm looking at these, a woman walked up, who was apparently also a DVC member, and looking at one of the plain DVC t-shirts, said to me 'You know, they should Give us one of these just for signing up.'

And I stopped.

I am not necessarily cheap. And I know that I am definitely **not** a good steward of my personal economic resources. But I AM also the kind of a guy who has been known to take the car dealership name off of my car, because unless they're willing to pay me to advertise for them, I'm not doing it for free. And I've yet to meet an auto dealer who will pay me. And so I think to myself about this white static cling Disney Vacation Club sticker. Am I willing to pay \$9 bucks to put a thing on my vehicle that ADVERTISES something which I have to pay to be a part of? Why am I willing to DO something, to actively proclaim in word and action this, albeit fun, but secular, group, when there is not a single *Christian* symbol on my vehicle?

In the letter from James, the author is writing to all the believers in general (1:1 - "to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion") but he's writing about **belonging**. And he's writing about **doing**. He'll get more in-depth as the letter progresses, but he starts off reminding us here of who God is, and what God does for us. The good stuff that we do, James reminds us - that's from God. Jesus said that God is with us always, and God fulfills that promise daily. But then James reminds us that we are more than simply recipients of God's graciousness: "Be doers, and not merely hearers." Why? Because in doing, we fulfill our faith. In doing, we live out those promises that were made at our baptism, and that, depending on our current age, we affirmed for ourselves, probably somewhere around when we were in Jr. High.

Those promises that we heard this morning. Those same promises that Tom & Gerrie took on for Carter's sake. Do you remember what they promised? "As you bring Carter to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities: to live with him among God's faithful people, bring him to the word of God and the holy supper, teach him the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, place in his hands the holy scriptures, and nurture him in faith and prayer, so that Carter may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace." But it wasn't just Tom & Gerrie to whom this was addressed. They said 'yes, we are willing to take on these promises.' But, then do you remember what else I did? Who else did I turn to? The people of God. I asked you, are you willing to take this on? Not just grandparents, and aunts and uncles - but, all of us gathered here. Are you willing to take on the responsibility to help Carter grow in his faith and you know what you said? 'We will.'

You are just as responsible to be doers, and not just hearers. Kind of like those folk I saw at Disney: those tattooed and pierced folk; those folk striving to stand out, yet belong to a greater

whole. Carter now, too, both stands out and belongs. Carter's got his own tattoo now. Only it's not one that everyone can see. It's a marking for the eyes of God. That cross made with oil, that scent that will wash off tonight when he gets scrubbed down, but it will never go away.

And he's not the only one here so marked. Each and every one of us who have been baptized has that same sign on our heads. And even though we can't see it, that cross is there. And is as visible as the rose, or American flag or dragon or skull, or, as some pastors that I know have a chi rho (cr) or a Celtic cross or the three interlocking circles. Even better than any of those, however, is that cross on our foreheads, which proclaims to all that we belong to God.

We didn't pay anything to receive it. We can't do anything to earn it. It is a gift freely given. And we are then called to tell others, in word and deed, by what we do and by what we say and by how we live and by how we treat each other. Not only when we are here in this place, in this building. But, rather wherever we go, whenever we are, in all that we do, we are called to be **doers**, and not simply hearers.

Amen.