

# Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



September 19, 2021, Volume 20

## Cultivate Character

Does character matter? Based upon how our society talks about politics and justice for people of varying race, gender, and sexual orientation and for the poor, my answer would be, “No.” In media today we receive messages that lack compassion, empathy, and humility—the virtues of character. However, looking at **readings from the book of James in this month’s lectionary**, we are urged to consider the importance of one’s character in Christ. **Character is one’s identity reflected in what one says and does.**

The book of James is an interesting one; the author is purported to be the brother of Jesus himself. It is only five chapters in length and was denigrated by Martin Luther as being “an epistle of straw” because of its emphasis on good works which, of course, can’t earn anyone their salvation. James doesn’t really advocate for earning one’s righteousness through works but, instead, stresses the importance of character. Thinking about character leads to many questions. Do our actions and words align with Christian faith? What virtues form a Christian character? How do practices such as prayer affect our character? What do my words and deeds say about my character?

I have watched fellow Lutherans, people who have expressed deep faith in Jesus, say and do things online and beyond that contradict Christ’s call to suffer with and alongside all of God’s people. I’m prone to do this as well. Many of us today act and speak relatively and have become less discerning in how we live out our relationships with friends, family, and strangers. As a result, our emotional and spiritual wellness has suffered. We, at best, become crass and uncaring, and, at worst, become depressed, angry, even suicidal or, in some cases, act out in violence toward others. Character matters!

The September readings from James prove that character does, indeed, matter. It is not a personal choice that occurs at some point, but rather begins when we allow ourselves to be formed by Christ. For many, Christian character began with baptismal promises made by parents and sponsors and was nurtured both at home and in community with others in the faith. We study, we learn, we practice, we pray. As James writes, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (4:8). Only when we draw near to Christ and allow Him to work in us will we be able to discern what to do and what to say, and, very importantly, reject anything that conflicts with our Christian character.

A reflection by Pastor Aaron Fuller in *Living Lutheran*, September, 2021