

EASTER 5: CANTATE

James 1:16-21

See the Whole Yardstick

The earth is warming! The earth is warming! And I have to admit, that sounds good to me. Did you know there was a warming phase at the time of the Vikings? Without it, they'd never have made it to North America on the boats they had. Farming prospered in Scotland—wishful thinking now—and it was boom time in Northern Europe. Boomtown in the north sounds pretty nice now doesn't it, especially after the last few years. I wouldn't mind an orange tree in the back yard, and I could wear my big fat party animal Hawaiian shirt year round.

But there's a lesson to be learned in the panic over global warming. Think of all the measures people are trying to implement to ward off the danger they admit is a long ways off. We're told to get new light bulbs. Those with big Chevy pickups are told to trade them in, not only because they're not Fords, but because they're burping death into the ozone. We're told we should buy CO2 indulgences from those who have extra carbon footprint merits to sell. I even read in a German newspaper that the European Union is trying to make farmers change the food they feed their cows because, believe it or not, cows are one of the chief global warming culprits, because of how what goes in them comes out. We must stop these gas-passing bovines, I say. Eat a hamburger, save the world.

Now I'm not a scientist or the son of a scientist, but I do know many have taken an almost apocalyptic view of things over global warming. Change or die. Repent or be taxed and regulated. Pay for your sins or burn and drown in nature's judgment day. And, as often happens in a religious system, the only ones exempted from the rules seem to be the prelates, or politicians, making them.

St. James was no politician, however. Someone who wrote and preached like St. James would hardly stand a chance in an election. That's why God calls His servants instead of running a campaign for them. St. James was a boxer in the pulpit, pulling no punches, swinging with all he had to knock some sense into the recipients of his letter, pounding with the law to make it count when he finally hit them with the gospel. This is the guy, after all, who lays it all out when he warns, "*Faith without works is dead,*" not that we might toss out faith, but, rather, that we might know what real faith is, a living, breathing gift from God, and when it's time to take the paddles and defibrillate it.

I've always wanted a yardstick, maybe with my name carved in it. There's something about teaching with a yardstick in hand that makes teaching more fun, and maybe even students more attentive. Perhaps you'd think twice about dozing off if I had one in the pulpit. Well, let's see.

Here's eternity. Now, in eternity, do you know how much space your life, the earth's life, and every other thing you can possibly worry about takes up. Not even a speck. You couldn't even see it with a magnifying class. Here is eternity. You can see it from anywhere

in church. But none of you, not even you courageous Lutherans in the front pews, can see today, can see tomorrow, can see 2017, let alone 3007. I told you yardsticks were great. *“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

Maybe the world is warming up. Just in case, I’ll buy an orange tree and leave my Hawaiian shirt out. Maybe you’ll all pitch in and buy some real trucks with the blue ovals on the back or change your light bulbs. Maybe cows will learn better manners or we’ll order a double whopper instead of a regular one. Who knows? What I do know is that in the grand scheme of seaweed wrapping around your legs as the water rises, global warming is not the greatest danger you face, and there are no indulgences for the forgiveness you need. Look at the whole yardstick and gain perspective.

“Of his own will the Father brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” The Father of heavenly lights has given you the greatest gift of all: His Son, *“the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”* He has given you the yardstick. Are you going to trade it for a speck you can’t even see, no matter how much that invisible speck shines in the old Adam’s eye?

If you can get anywhere but in God’s Word in a day, step back and see the whole yardstick. If you can make it anywhere but God’s house in a week, step back and see the whole yardstick. If you keep falling into the filth and rampant wickedness that the world calls clean but your conscience assures you is dirty, step back and see the whole yardstick. If you’ve forgotten where what you have has come from and who has given it to you, step back and see the whole yardstick. If beers with the buddies or shopping with the girls is consistently written in bigger letters on your calendar or higher on your priority list than Body and Blood with the Lord, step back and see the whole yardstick. If you have been quick to speak and slow to hear, step back and see the whole yardstick. If anger has been winning the race with patience in your life, step back and see the whole yardstick. If what God says concerns you less than what your friends might say, step back and see the whole yardstick. Squinting all the time is bad for your eyes, so stop trying to inflate the speck, and step back and see the whole yardstick. The world may be warming up, but it is nowhere as warm as where the speck leads; step back and see the whole yardstick.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” And above is just where Jesus Christ has come from, and you are just for whom He’s come. There is no variation or shadow due to change in the Father. He has implanted Christ in your heart through faith. Why strangle what He has sown by the death and resurrection of His only-begotten Son? Rather, like a child marking his height on the wall every year, rejoice as God grows what He has planted. It is better when the marks on the wall go up and not down after all. Who knows, maybe one day that seed will be as big as the yardstick. The Father knows, and, unless you won’t have it, He’s promised it will be, as He waters you with His

Word and feeds you with the Sacrament. You've been given the whole yardstick. Step back and see it today, and don't forget what you've seen as we wait for the harvest. Amen.