

**Augusta First Baptist Church**  
**James 4:13-17**  
***Challenge to Faith: Facing Your Future***  
**April 1, 2007**  
Lenten Series 2007

James 4:13-17

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." [14] Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. [17] Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.*

Matthew 6:25 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*

Today marks the sixth Sunday of Lent, which is also known as Palm Sunday. This is the beginning of Holy Week, where we remember Jesus' journey into Jerusalem and the cross that awaits him. Throughout this season we have symbolically made this journey with him by considering the various challenges of faith: doubt, loneliness, forgiveness, healing, and listening to our past. Today, our challenge of faith is, "Facing the Future."

Why is facing the future a challenge of faith? In part, because each of us faces the future with some level of anxiety, and anxiety, left unattended, will eat away at one's faith. When Jesus set his face, as Luke phrases it, to go to Jerusalem, and by doing so, faced his death, facing the future became a corrosive fear among the disciples. We have several verses where Jesus seeks to embolden his disciples towards facing the future. In John 14, Jesus reminded his followers, *"Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* In Matthew 6 Jesus said, *"...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or...what you will wear."* *Even on the cross, dying between two thieves, he assured the one who only wanted to be remembered when he died with the words, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).*

Of course, we *do* worry about our future. We worry about our health, our wealth, about dying and what happens after we die.

A few weeks ago, we had a representative visit the church from the Annuity Board, where most of the church staff invests for retirement. Each of us had the opportunity to sit down one on one and discuss our retirement plans and investments. Now, I know that retirement for me is some thirty or so years away, but I have to tell you, there is something mildly disconcerting about planning for a future, of which none of us has any way to envision, and the internal questions like, "Am I saving enough? Will I live too long? Will my family be cared for?" eat away at us.

What are the fears we face for the future? War, global warming, aging, retirement, health, flu pandemic, the well-being of our children, grandchildren, graduation, getting a job, relationships, the possibility, hope or fear of getting married. Perhaps, it is more than a little ironic that we speak of the challenge of facing the future as April 15<sup>th</sup> approaches, and some of us worry about the tax forms that need to be filed! Every one of us in this room stands on the common ground that our future is unknown to us.

Futurist, Peter Drucker, who has made untold wealth inspiring business leaders about the future, writes, "We know two things about the future: it can not be known and it will be different from what exists now and from what we now expect." We just do not know about what is in store for our future: *Theoretically, television may be feasible, but I consider it an impossibility--a development which we should waste little time dreaming about.*

Lee de Forest, 1926, inventor of the cathode ray tube.

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*I think there is a world market for about five computers.*

Thomas J. Watson, 1943, Chairman of the Board of IBM.

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*We don't think the Beatles will do anything in their market. Guitar groups are on their way out.*

Recording company expert, 1962.

The believer's response to the future is not to be filled with dread and anxiety – the future is going to happen no matter what. But, neither should it be faced with an arrogant assurance of how we think it will be.

So, what does faith teach us about the future, that fills some with dread and others with arrogance?

### **Facing Our Future is About Submission:**

James writes to fellow believers and states in verse 14: "... *you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*"

To obsess about the future, is to wrestle with control. The fact is, we are not ultimately in control of our future, which means ultimately, we do not have control. *Authentic faith involves submission to God* (William Blevins).

The passage in James prompts us to remember the story Jesus told of the one who built bigger barns (Luke 12:13ff.). Like the man who desired bigger barns, James reminds those in the business community, that it is just as important that God be sovereign over one's business, as he is with the church.

The challenge of faith in facing the future, begins with the submission of releasing over to God the ways we derive income and make our living.

As a sub-point, I am concerned that we may take our future too seriously, which is essentially an unwillingness to submit. I read that Thomas Jefferson kept a meticulous journal, in which he not only recorded his thoughts, but even things he bought and the date of purchase. On May 23, 1776, Jefferson moved into a three story brick home, and was soon entrusted to write the Declaration of Independence. What goes through the thought of such a man, who was entrusted to write one of this country's most important documents? It is hard to say, but we do know what he bought: May 24--fiddle strings; May 27--toys; May 28--a doll. It also shows, he bought during that momentous session of Continental Congress, fishing tackle, a pair of boots, a hat and guitar strings. Now, June 1st seems to be the day Jefferson got serious about his writing responsibility, because there he purchased paper. But, do you know what else he paid for that same day-- one shilling to see a monkey.

There is a revolution brewing, and old TJ is paying somebody to see their monkey. But maybe, Tom was onto something, perhaps, he knew that life is not--should not be--all serious. Let me add, however, that submission is not the same thing as quiet resignation. Therefore...

### **Facing Our Future is about Intention:**

In verse 17, of our passage James writes: "*Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.*" James, you see, was concerned that one's faith, including the future, was to be an intentional expression. "A saving faith," as one author phrased it, "is a living faith" (author unknown). James himself wrote, that we are to be "...doers of the word, and not merely hearers..." (1:23).

I appreciate the words Kirby Godsey, penned some years back: “The measure of our lives is not how long we have lived, but how deeply we have loved.” In reality, we face our future much as we do our present – by reducing it down to the basics of love.

Soren Kierkegaard phrased it this way: “Live life related rightly to eternity.” We face the future by facing the day, and the moment, in relationship to eternity. “The meaning of eternity, is that you and I are made for God.” (Kirby Godsey)

I believe not only are we to face our future submissively and intentionally, but finally...

### **Facing Our Future is about Hope**

The letter of James, is a book that speaks of God’s sovereignty, over our words, our actions, over our business dealings and our future. When God is sovereign, facing the future is an action of hope. People do not need another artificial standard to strive after. They need hope itself for the living of these days. We all need help with living – physicians, counselors, ministers, or a friend can be purveyors of hope.

In fact, that is why we exist as a church – we are to be God’s messengers of hope, by practicing a faith of healing, where our fragments in belief can be nourished into whole garments of hope.

In this series, we have spoken about challenges of our faith – doubt, loneliness, forgiveness, and healing. In practicing our faith, we pull these fragments together by becoming a messenger of hope.

An interesting map is on display in the British Museum in London. It's an old mariner's chart, drawn in 1525, outlining the North American coastline and adjacent waters. The cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map that represented regions not yet explored. He wrote: "Here be giants," "Here be fiery scorpions," and "Here be dragons." Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British explorer in the early 1800's. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he wrote these words across the map: "Here is God." ([Unknown](#))

Hope gives us the courage to struggle, the strength to fail and the fortitude to face defeat. Why? Because the future – like our past and our present – is God’s.

We do not face the future by saying glibly: “Don’t worry; everything is going to be alright. God is going to take care of everything.” No. We face the future, intending to overturn the steely fingers of violence and terror. We face the future by not accepting oppression. We face the future by driving out the loneliness from the despondent and by binding up the broken hearted.

Hope does not simply change our outlook. It changes our behavior. It changes us. With it, we can face our future and overcome any challenge to our faith.

Today as we set our sights for the bloody timbers of the cross, we are called to be the community of hope. It is here, where we see beyond the death of Good Friday, into Easter resurrection.