

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Stars Upon Thars

Watch

Follow this link and watch "The Sneetches" by Dr. Seuss.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBCUkdd57qc>

Gospel Lesson

James 2:1-9 (NSRV)

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸ You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹ But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Sermon Focus

Is the greatest tragedy of the story of the Sneetches that those without stars believed they were less valuable? Or is it equally as tragic that those with stars believed in their own superiority?

Said another way, is the oppression of the "have-nots" more tragic than the "haves" believing that they are actually superior? Theologians and philosophers have tried to answer this question for a long time. Many theologians and biblical scholars have noticed that the God of the Bible tends to have a "preferential option for the poor" even as the world continues to show favoritism toward the privileged.

Either way, it was this false division, playing out in very real power structures, that allowed Sylvester McMonkey McBean to exploit the conflict of the Sneetches for a profit while promising to finally "fix" the situation.

Sylvester McMonkey McBean's great fix was not to address the actual question of why the Sneetches made value-based judgements on physical appearance, or why and how stars on the belly became a hegemonic normative, or why and how bellies without stars became "othered." Sylvester McMonkey McBean's fix was to change the appearance of the Sneetches, leaving the oppressive power structures intact, while making them also...profitable.

James, like many biblical writers, was well aware of how class and power are used to divide people. The ones with "more" are often considered "better" or "closer to divine" whereas the rest are "lesser" or "hellish." The power of hegemony is the myth that those who belong in the dominant group hold the keys to "right living" and that everyone else should adapt and conform to them.

Yet, as Pastor Andy quoted Audre Lorde, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." When the Sneetches rejected the division between them and stopped believing the myth that the stars on their bellies defined them, then they were truly free to be a community together.

This community is what the church is all about. This community is the Kingdom of God, present in the here and now, even as the kingdoms of this world (and those like Sylvester McMonkey McBean) continue to define our worth.

The story of the Sneetches and the book of James are indicting. They should feel indicting, because they are speaking truth to power. Both point to things in this world that try to define our worth, and powers which exploit our insecurities as well as our feelings of superiority - human issues felt by us all. As people of faith, we are called to work and grow and resist such evil. We are called to gather together as equals - stars on bellies or not.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Reflect on the Bible verses for today. What images and/or ideas do they bring to mind?
- 2) What are some of the ways we are exploited for a profit? Who benefits from that exploitation?
- 3) Who are the Sylvester McMonkey McBean's of our world?
- 4) This week's sermon talked about liberation theology and Paulo Freire's idea of "conscientization." Conscientization is the process of becoming aware of how you are objectified by the systems in which you live. In this process those who are being oppressed not only become aware that they are being oppressed, but also act to take part in their liberation. How do you take part in your own liberation? How do we get free?

Prayer

Holy God, send your Spirit of liberation, your wise Sophia of guidance into our hearts and our community. Help us to see your children as you do. Guide us to be members of each other in the body, present in your Kingdom. Forgive us our sin of judgement. Free us, to love each other. Amen.

*"The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches.
And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.
That day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars and whether
They had one, or not, upon thars"*