

March 7, 2021

1. Relating to One Another— James 2:1-13

“Struggling to Love”

As I read the passage for this week’s study from James 2, part of me feels comforted that these words of Scripture are as relevant to us as they were back then; part of me is dismayed that we still haven’t figured this stuff out. While I am hopeful that I can accurately say that most churches today have at least moved past the blatant discrimination described by James, I am also painfully aware of the many ways our church cultures and practices can be exclusionary to someone who is an “outsider”—whether based on socioeconomic status, race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation, to name but a few.

The scene James paints of different levels of welcome and honor ascribed based on externalities is apparently a universal reality. Just this week, Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, a Canadian member of parliament (MP) who is a visible minority—a young Inuit woman with ceremonial facial tattoos—described in a radio interview the experience she’s had moving around the capitol. She said that security regularly assumes that she isn’t a member of parliament and she is asked over and over to show ID by guards who are supposed to recognize MPs so that they can move about their offices and do their jobs with ease. This treatment is a microcosm of the broader discrepancies Qaqqaq is seeking to address at a federal level between Inuit and white communities regarding access to safe water and adequate housing. (Hint: the white majority has these things, many Inuit and Indigenous communities do not).¹ Do I think of my Indigenous and Inuit neighbors when I move about my large, heated, mold-free home or fill a glass with clean water?

James tells the early believers that when they participate in these kinds of acts of favoritism, they deny their faith in the power of Christ’s resurrection and commit sin. The solution, what James calls “the royal law of love”—*to love your neighbor as yourself*—is both profoundly simple and yet proves to be so challenging. Hence, we’re still wrestling with discrimination in the world and in the church in 2021.

Love is a whole lot easier said than done, as Mr. Rogers so eloquently reminds us: “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.”² Accepting others as they are is hard enough when they are my family—like me in nearly every way. It’s increasingly more difficult when there is a chasm of difference in the lived experiences between another person and me. Would I be willing to swap

¹. “Nunavut MP Speaks about Return to Parliament after Extended Leave,” CBC, February 28, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nunavut-mp-return-mumilaaq-gaqqaq-1.5931320>.

². Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (Philadelphia: Hachette Books, 2003), n.p.

homes with an Inuit Canadian family? If not, am I loving my neighbor as myself? To live according to this royal law of love requires us to go deeper than appearances and external value systems, to see the other as a beloved child, a bearer of God's image, just as we are. May we engage in this type of deep seeing to move us to the deep loving that James describes (vv. 14-26), a love and faith that is paired with action.

—Rachel Wallace

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Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.

Resources for this session

- Elizabeth Soto Albrecht is the presenter for unit 1, God's Holy People. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. *The videos are free and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).*