“Let Go Of Your Ego”

James 4:7-12
Pentecost 19 (B)

How many of you remember the *Eggo* waffles’ commercials from years ago? Two people would be at the kitchen table with a toaster sitting on it. An *Eggo* waffle would pop up from the toaster and both people would grab the waffle at the same time. Then, one of them would say, “L’eggo my *Eggo!*” “L’eggo my *Eggo*” became one of the most recognized commercial slogans of the 1970s.

This morning the Bible is going to teach us about letting go of something much more significant than a frozen waffle. St. James will remind us why it is so vitally important to, not l’eggo an *Eggo*, but to “Let Go Of Your Ego.”

I. So That You Can Grab on to God

The word “ego” is a Latin word meaning “I.” Your ego is your view of yourself. Most of the time, we use the word “ego” in a negative sense as in, “Wow, does he have a massive ego!” We mean the person is full of himself. He is arrogant. He is prideful.

Pride is your soul’s greatest enemy. Pride ruins your relationship with God and with other people. Pride is the original sin. Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree – why? Because they proudly thought that they knew better than God. That is what every single sin is, isn’t it? Sin is saying, either consciously or unconsciously, “I know better than you, God.” This is the height of arrogance, the peak of pride. And as long as you are convinced that you know better than God, you cannot know God. Because, as C.S. Lewis put it, “In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that - and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison - you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you” (*Mere Christianity*).

There are three very powerful forces trying to convince us that we know better than God. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh – a true axis of evil. These three are at war with God and your soul is a battleground. You are like Germany during the Thirty Years War. From 1618-1648 a great war was waged in Europe. The opponents were from the north of Germany and from the south of Germany. Guess where the battles were fought? For thirty years war waged back and forth on German soil and decimated the countryside.

Your soul stands between God on one side and the axis of evil on the other. The devil, the world and your own sinful flesh are trying with all their might to convince you that you know better than God, that you don’t need God, that what you need is to believe in yourself. Listen to the way the world around us speaks. “Believe in yourself!” we are told. Parents are warned, “Do not chastise your children or you will ruin their self-esteem.” Teenagers are told, “Be independent! Do your own thing!” Have you ever asked yourself why the world thinks this way? Why do the people of the world place so much faith in themselves and encourage you to place so much faith in yourself? Because if you don’t believe there is a God who loves you and will take care of you, then you have to take care of yourself. There is simply no other option.
But for us there is. Since there IS a God who loves us, our goal is not to build up our egos. Our goal is to let go of our egos and grab on to God. James said it this way, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (vv. 7,8). James is describing this battle for your soul. He is pleading with you to resist the axis of evil and go toward God.

But, to do this, you must “Let Go Of Your Ego.” You cannot walk up to the almighty, holy, eternal ruler of the universe on your own terms. You cannot approach the blinding light of His goodness with your shoulders back, your chest puffed out and your chin in the air announcing, “Now, Lord, let me tell you how this relationship is going to work.” No, the only way to approach His Holiness is with humility. And the only way to have humility is by letting go of your ego. We do not approach Almighty God casually or flippantly. We approach with reverence and awe. We leave behind all pretence and posturing and pretending. All the games we play and disguises we wear to cover up our sinfulness before others are useless with the One who knows all.

So, James tells us, “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (v. 8). Stop your hands from doing the sins they been committing. Stop your heart from craving the things that are not of God while you are pretending to follow God. “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom” (v. 9). Stop laughing and joking about your sin. Stop thinking that your disobedience is something silly and realize it is something serious. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (v. 10). Here you have the difference between the way the world works and the way the Christian lives. The person of this world believes in himself and by inflating his ego tries to lift himself up. The Christian lets go of his ego, humbles himself before the Lord and THE LORD lifts him up.

We used to have kneelers in churches. For whatever reason, they aren’t as popular as they once were. Kneeling is a good posture for people. It is a physical reminder of our humility before the Lord. Growing up I can remember kneeling alongside the rest of my family as we said the confession of sins at the beginning of the church service. Then, after the pastor announced the forgiveness Jesus won for us, we stood up to sing a song of praise. That is what God does for His beloved children who come to Him in true humility. He lifts you up and says, “You are a forgiven child of the King. I love you. I am caring for you. Whatever is on your mind this morning...let it go. I am in charge, not you. I know what is best, not you. I have the power to make things right, not you.” THIS is the freedom and peace that become yours when you “Let Go Of Your Ego.”

II. So That You Can Embrace Others

Something else wonderful happens when you “Let Go Of Your Ego.” You are able to embrace other people. You are able to love them. I mean love them in the way God would have you love them. So often what passes off as love is really selfishness. We say and do nice things just so that we can get something in return. You send a card to someone just so that you can hear them say how much they appreciated the card you sent. This isn’t love. It’s ego. It is a way of trying to puff myself up.

Sometimes my ego rears its ugly head in a more obvious way – I speak ill of others. I say things behind someone else’s back that gives the person a bad reputation. And why? Certainly not because it is going to help the person in any way. I slander the person because it makes me feel better about myself. It inflates my ego.
Once again we see what a dangerous thing ego is. First, it destroys my relationship with God and then it destroys my relationship with other people. When your ego gets its way you cannot have a healthy relationship with other human beings. You can only look down on them. Sure, you might be nice at times but it’s really only patronizing, a sort of pat on the head. And more often than not, ego doesn’t even allow for that. Ego places you squarely on your soapbox where you can look down on everyone around you and either shake your finger at them while scolding or point out their faults to others because you are too cowardly to shake your finger at them.

It doesn’t take a trained theologian to recognize that this is not proper behavior for followers of Jesus Christ. James tells us, “Brothers, do not slander one another...who are you to judge your neighbor” (vv. 11,12)? James is not saying we should never make a judgment about another person’s behavior. That is a lie the devil gets a great deal of mileage out of. The Bible tells us over and over again that we need to admonish and correct others when we see them fall into sin. It is not judging that is wrong. It is having a wrong attitude while judging that is wrong. It is having an attitude of arrogance that is wrong. It is, once again, letting our ego get the better of us. And it is a vicious cycle. I slander other people BECAUSE I feel superior to them and when I slander other people it makes me feel even MORE superior to them.

James says, “Let Go Of Your Ego.” Follow the example of the Apostle Paul who said that he was the worst of sinners. If I am convinced that I am the worst of sinners I cannot possibly think I am better than anyone else. And I am certainly not going to go around telling other people about someone else’s sins when I have so many of my own. Out of love I will warn others when they fall into sin but I will do so with humility because I know that I am no better. I am not coming down on that person. I am coming alongside of that person so that I can help direct them back to God’s path.

Have you ever seen the television show Hoarders? It is about therapists helping people who cannot seem to get rid of anything to the point where their homes are so full of stuff that they become nearly unlivable. Do you tend in that direction, do you have a difficult time letting things go? Do you have boxes filled with parachute pants or leisure suits just waiting for them to come back in style? Have you kept an old, broken down lawn mower in your backyard on the slight chance that you will need that particular throttle cable someday? We are all different when it comes to letting go. But, as Christians, letting go of our ego is not an option. It is God’s command. May He help us to let go of our egos so that we are able to grab on to God and embrace one another. Amen.