



**Carstairs-Bancroft United Church**  
February 10, 2022  
**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT**  
**DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**  
**By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces**



Photo: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

**Today's Inspiration in one sentence**  
**“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”** (James 4:10)

**Did You Know?**

- The author identifies himself as **James** (1:1); he was probably the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Four men in the New Testament have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who died too early (AD 44) to have written it. The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had.
  - James was one of several brothers of Jesus, probably the oldest since he heads the list in Mt. 13:55. After Jesus' resurrection, James became very prominent in the Jerusalem church:
    - James was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection.
    - Paul called him a “pillar” of the church (Gal 2:9);
    - Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Gal 1:19); as well as on his last visit (Acts 21:18);
    - When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friend to tell James, presumably because James was a key leader in the church (Acts 12:17);
    - Jude could identify himself simply as “a brother of James” (Jude 1:1), so well known was James. James was martyred c. AD 62, an event recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities*, 20.9.1).
  - Some date the letter in the early 60s. There are indications however, that it was written before AD 50. Some of these rationales are: the letter's distinctively Jewish nature, which suggests that it was composed when the church was still predominantly Jewish; it reflects a simple church order; there is no reference to the controversy over Gentile circumcision. If this early dating is correct, this letter is the earliest of all New Testament writings.

(The NIV Study Bible; James)

**Personal Insight**

Watching the news and seeing how people in general are at the end of their ropes as far as patience and respecting others' rights go made me ponder.

This pandemic hasn't been easy on any of us. It is probably not an efficient comfort to say that life has never been easy. The Christian folks in the first century were tortured and thrown for lions just because of their faith. But I find it encouraging that the same God, who upheld those first century Christians in their suffering is ready to stand by us as well.

When we struggle with our life circumstances, developing faith in the Almighty, who promises to draw near to us when we yearn for the Holy One's presence, and to lift us up when we humble ourselves before our Creator can provide us resilience and integrity. Moreover, with it comes a firm hope that points beyond our earthly lives.

Grace and peace to you all, Rev. Maria



## Mortality and Humility

*What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

James 4:14

### READ James 4:7 - 17

Ancient scholars Jerome and Tertullian referenced stories of how in ancient Rome, after a general triumphed in an epic victory, he would be paraded atop a gleaming chariot down the capital's central thoroughfares from dawn to sunset. The crowd would roar. The general would bask in the adoration, reveling in the greatest honor of his life. However, legend has it that a servant stood behind the general the entire day, whispering into his ear, *Memento mori* ("Remember you will die"). Amid all the adulation, the general desperately needed the humility that came with remembering that he was mortal.

James wrote to a community infected with prideful desires and an inflated sense of self-sufficiency. Confronting their arrogance, he spoke a piercing word: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble" (James 4:6). What they needed was to "humble [themselves] before the Lord" (v. 10). And how would they embrace this humility? Like Roman generals, they needed to remember that they would die. "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow," James insisted. "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (v. 14). And owning their frailty freed them to live under the solidity of the "Lord's will" rather than their own fading efforts (v. 15).

When we forget that our days are numbered, it can lead to pride. But when we're humbled by our mortality, we see every breath and every moment as grace. *Memento mori*. – By **Winn Collier**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**God, I like to think that my life is in my control. I sometimes act as though I'll live forever. Humble me. Help me find life only in You. Amen.**

What does this story of the Roman generals and the phrase *Memento mori* say to you? Why do you need to remember your mortality?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Several men in the New Testament are named James, including the son of Zebedee/brother of John (Matthew 4:21; Acts 12:2) and the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). The James who authored the book of James was the half-brother of Jesus (13:55). While early in Jesus' ministry James didn't believe in Him, after he saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7), he moved from unbelief to belief. In Acts 1:14, James appears to be present in the upper room after Jesus' ascension and became a leader in the Jerusalem church (12:17; 15:13). - By **Bill Crowder**

*Used with permission*