

Home Service for September 5, 2021

Welcome and Announcements

You might notice a few changes. You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Remember God's gracious abundance and give thanks. Remember Christ's call upon our lives to be faithful. Open yourself to the Holy Spirit. For this is the time to worship.

Call to Worship:

Those who trust in God are like the mountains, immovable and abiding. God shelters the people: today and for eternity. Rich or poor, God creates us to pursue justice and to care for one another. Be a blessing, O God, to those who are good and upright in heart. God calls us to be rich in faith, to honor our heritage as heirs of the Kingdom. We are blessed when we share our blessings, that peace may be upon the people.

Opening Prayer:

Lord of mercy and compassion, be with us this day as we hear of the healing love of Jesus. Remind us that we are also recipients of his compassion and we are called to bring the same hope and love to others. Prepare us for service in His Name.
AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, we come before you today knowing that we often fall short of your call to love one another well. We allow ourselves to be blinded by wealth and power. We ignore those around us who suffer injustice, poverty, and rejection. We tune out the cries of the poor and those on the edges of our communities. Help us to see your great generosity, hear your word of mercy, and feel your great love for all who need your redemptive grace. Strengthen us to reach out in service to those who are in need. Make us aware of those outside our own communities, that we may see them as your precious children and serve them in humility and joy. May we continue to grow in grace as we learn how to serve you in the name of the great Servant, even Jesus Christ. Amen.

Words of Assurance

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God. May we understand the grace and forgiveness bestowed upon us by God, that others may find the Kingdom within us and among us.

Read Psalm 124

If the LORD had not been on our side—
let Israel say—
² if the LORD had not been on our side
when people attacked us,
³ they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;
⁴ the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
⁵ the raging waters
would have swept us away.
⁶ Praise be to the LORD,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

Prayers of the People:

Lord, you know how great our needs are. In these difficult times when jobs are threatened, homes are being lost, families are experiencing great stress, come and bring your healing love to us. Help us to place our trust in you. Remind us again of how you transform lives, not just with healing, but with a spirit of hope and compassion. Keep us hopeful. Teach us not to give up when things are going wrong. Give us faith that can move mountains. Give us hearts that are ready to be of service to others in all times and in all places. As we have lifted up people and situations which concern us and have asked for your hand of healing, remind us that that same healing hand rests on us also. Enable us to be people of compassion and trust; for we ask these things in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

A good name is more desirable than great riches;
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

² Rich and poor have this in common:

The LORD is the Maker of them all.

⁸ Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity,
and the rod they wield in fury will be broken.

⁹ The generous will themselves be blessed,
for they share their food with the poor.

²² Do not exploit the poor because they are poor
and do not crush the needy in court,

²³ for the LORD will take up their case
and will exact life for life.

Read the Epistle Lesson: James 2:1-17

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"^[a] you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are

convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,”^[b] also said, “You shall not murder.”^[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Mark 7:24-37

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.^[a] He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁸ “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹ Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.^[b] ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “*Ephphatha!*” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Message

Today's readings center on justice. Proverbs reminds us to take care of those around us who are in need, especially the poor and vulnerable. The psalmist proclaims the goodness of God and encourages the worshipping community which means us to walk in the ways of God. James shares what it means to be faithful in the eyes of God: Faith requires actions, specifically the actions of taking care of those who have been forgotten by society. And in the Gospel of Mark, a woman who has been shunned by the community reminds Jesus that she and her daughter are deserving of God's goodness and mercy. Jesus brings healing to her and to many others. These passages remind us that we too are called by God to help those around us.

As you can hear there is so much that we could take time to discuss, I felt the need to limit it to the Epistle Lesson from the book of James. There seems to be two types of Christians in the world. While some Christians are genuine and alive, others only give the appearance of spiritual life but in reality are fake. How can I know whether I have a living faith or a false faith? This morning's lesson from James can help to give us some answers to that question.

Maybe we should start with asking ourselves a few all important questions. Is your life of faith readily apparent to all you meet? Do they recognize faith's fruits? Can they see the love of Christ who showed no favoritism, but died for all, in the way you treat and respect everyone? Is it readily apparent to others that you are someone who "spends time with Jesus"? Or is it something else they see?

Some things are rather obvious and can't be hidden, some things like faith. Perhaps you can recall what happened when the Jewish leaders saw "the boldness of Peter and John" in the days following Pentecost. At first the leaders were confounded by the confidence with which these men carried themselves because they figured them to be "uneducated and untrained." But then they realized who Peter and John really were. They recognized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

That's because a saving faith in Christ Jesus, can't go unnoticed. It stands out for all to see. It shows itself in its expressions of care, in its deeds of love, in its works of affection; which might well explain why James writes as he does in our text, that "faith without works is dead." It's not really faith at all.

James is quite clear that we should not hold our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as a sign of personal favoritism. Nor should we be partial to anyone. How similar our

day is to James's day; we tend to cater to those who are wealthy or are dressed well or look good. In so doing we are showing partiality.

Have you ever wondered: Why on earth do we feel as if we have to discriminate between others based on where the others were born, or where they live, or what color their skin is, or if they are rich or poor, blue collar or white collar, English speaking or Spanish speaking...or if they just have a different accent based on where they have been raised...?

How wonderfully different our world would be if we were to see the differences between us as fascinating and neat...as they are seen through a child's eyes...instead of threatening or not as good! ? A living faith is one that welcomes equally the poor and rich, the black and white and brown, the educated and uneducated, the well-dressed and the poorly dressed. Discrimination is sin and we need to call it such, no more or less loudly than we speak of every sin.

God does not show favoritism and neither should we! Everyone we see, everyone we look at, everyone we meet...is to be Jesus to us...whether they are dressed in rags, or in the most expensive designer clothes. For all are sinners in need of God's love, mercy, kindness and salvation. God does not judge people as people judge people. God looks at the inside...we, often tend to look at the outside. What does God see when He looks at the inside of us?

Christians ought to produce good works because on the inside God has changed us. To use a biblical analogy, we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We are not the same anymore, and because we have been changed from the inside out we naturally produce good works. It is as natural for a Christian to produce good works.

Good works for the Christian come in all shapes and sizes. Developing Christian character, ministering to the needs of others, and sharing the Word of God are just a few examples of good works. We could make an exhaustive list of good works that the believer could perform and never have a complete list. The key is that a living faith produces good works.

Living faith is the result of the work of God in bringing a person to salvation. Impartiality and good works are the results of a living faith. A living faith produces good things that bring praise and glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Help us to be instruments of Your compassion, O God, and when people are hurting in our midst, help us to hear their cries for help. Remove from us all racial prejudice and forgive us for the many ways we have been racist in the past. Open our mouths to speak the good news to others. Above all, show us the way to minister to all in need. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

*Go forth to love one another.
Be rich in faith and serve one another
in all joy and humility.
And may the power of God our Creator,
Christ our Salvation,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with us now and forever. Amen.*