



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 8th September 2024

compiled by Barbara Dalton - Local Preaching in training

Welcome to this time of worship in your own home, may God be with you and all those you love. Consider this week passing on the service to someone who might enjoy or benefit from it.

This week the focus is on looking at what is beneath the surface and not judging people on how they look.

Opening prayer

Still us, Lord God,

quieten our hearts and our minds as we gather in your presence.

Take from us the thoughts that distract,

the worries and concerns that pull and tug at the tailcoats of our attention

and help us to concentrate on you.

May your Spirit breathe life-giving breath into us,

working through us as individuals,

and among us as your body.

And may your name be praised

in the words we speak,

in the thoughts we think,

and in the things we do.

To you be all honour and all glory and praise,

the one, true and living God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Song: Psalm 146 (STF 837) Praise for God's Help

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,

who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The LORD will reign for ever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Reading: James 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17

Warning against Partiality

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 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, 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', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Reflection

In this section of the letter James is addressing a Christian community that was divided, in which partiality of the worst kind existed.

James' words, with their emphasis on positive discrimination, point to the fact that when God says something he means it! The Christian faith is not like a trip to a supermarket - you can't pick and mix what to put in your faith trolley and what to leave on the shelf. The laws are laid down - to be followed in their entirety - as they are, not as we like.

But do laws ever pass their sell-by date? If so, how do we decide which stand and which fall? Are there times when what is called for is to follow the spirit of the law rather than the law itself? Government laws are created almost daily. Is there any correlation between the number of laws being passed and enforced - and the level of trust that exists within society?

No doubt we have all come across people who are sticklers for the law, who eat, sleep and drink rules and regulations, those for whom it would be more than their 'job's worth' to show any flexibility in the law's application. The intention of legislation is to provide boundaries that set people free to live. Some people, however, allow that legislation to narrow down the field of play to almost oppressive dimensions. James doesn't want those who read his letter to be like that because when an individual sticks to the letter of the law, even the tiniest mistake means they've blown it. Instead, James calls people to live by 'the law of liberty'.

What might he mean by that?

One hallmark of this law of liberty is mercy: mercy that triumphs over judgement. Can you think of times when the law has not been broken, but it has been bent - and in your opinion rightly so? Have *you* ever done so? Why? What were the consequences?

James' words echo the greatest law ever written - love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself. Living this law of love, what effect might it have on what you say and on what you do? The letter of the law is relatively easy to follow. The law of love asks much more of us. These days image counts for a lot. Politicians have spin doctors to create the perfect photo opportunity whenever possible. Celebrities and stars have lifestyle gurus and the everyday woman, man or child in the street is encouraged to show the right labels on the clothes they wear. In this modern western world looks matter, however much we may protest our difference because we know that God looks not at the surface but at what's in people's hearts.

The recipients of James' letter would probably have said the same, yet they stand accused of favouritism - of favouring the well-dressed over the ragged, those who look good over those who smell bad. Are there people within our community whom we are inclined to ignore? Are there people on the world stage we're inclined to push aside or forget?

James' letter suggests that Christians are measured and judged by how they treat the poor - and by how they treat the rich. In our worshipping community do we exercise positive discrimination in favour of those with less? How do we react to those who have more?

Think of those who are always there when things need to be done in the church; those who can always be relied on to respond to a plea for help. Think too of those on the margins of our worshipping community, who find themselves in the shadows. Sometimes it can be easier to let the usual folk get on with things, but is there any advantage in asking those who have never volunteered to undertake a particular task? Those who are *un* usual?

James 2.5 says that God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith. Could those words provide us with a cop out, an excuse *not* to work to change the plight of the poor?

Romanticised notions of the poor abound. There's a chance that if we accept they're rich in spirit we may omit to fill their empty bellies. Are the poor justified in asking for rice rather than goodwill or even our prayers? Those who have visited or worked alongside the poorest in the world often return inspired by the energy and the joy they have experienced. Do the poor have more to teach us than we have to offer them?

I invite you to side with the poor of the world by eating plain rice for one meal a week, contributing the cost of that meal to an appropriate cause.

Song: Lord of all hopefulness (526 STF)

1] Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2] Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

3] Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4] Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day. *Jan Struther (Joyce Placzek) (1901-1953)*

Prayers of intercession

Teach us Lord Jesus, to be more like you.

*Open our eyes to see the people around us - people you love,
of all shapes and sizes, of all ages and colours,
in all sorts of places,*

the quiet and the loud, the young and the old.

*Help us to notice those with no friends, those with no homes,
those whose tummies rumble, and those with no job or money.*

Open our hands to reach out and hold theirs.

*We think of the needy people we hear about in other parts of the world
and we think of people nearer home who are just as desperate.*

*We know we shouldn't grow tired of helping,
so open our ears to the silent cries around us, as well as to the loud cries,
and help us to respond as you would, in love and for love's sake.*

Thank you for calling us to work with you in this world,
and thank you for sending your Spirit to help us.

May we never let you down.

*In Jesus' name. **Amen***

Oh God,

How many times must I pray for peace?

Despite all my prayers I see Gazan schools blown apart, lives shattered as people sought refuge and prayed.

I see hostages held and their families suffering every endless minute that they wait for release.

Why, oh why, oh God do my pleas fall on deaf ears, my tears rebound off stony ground and my hope falter under the sheer weight of death, destruction and devastation? Are you immune to this human suffering?

Yet, I know that your tears fall with mine, your hope is tested by the inhumanity of this current conflict and you yearn for that time when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, a time when they will not seek to hurt or destroy each other on your holy mountain.

So I pray again with all my heart for a ceasefire in Gaza, a release for the hostages and for a just solution that peace may flourish in the land where you walked. **Amen**

Closing prayer

Go now in the love of God,

to love God and one another.

Go with open hearts and hands and minds,
in his name and for his sake.

And may the blessing of God almighty
be with you and all his people everywhere,
now and always. **Amen**