

Sunday 9th September 2018

Trinity 15

Proper 18 **Green**



Collect

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

James 2:1-10, [11-13,] 13-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Sin of Partiality

2¹ My brothers,^[a] show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called? ⁸If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

[¹¹For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.]

Faith Without Works Is Dead

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and

lacking in daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^[b] is that?¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Footnotes: a. or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 5 & 14. b. or *benefit*.

COMMENT: The opening comments provide that favouring the wealthy creates social injustice. The first section of this reading, has the form of a sermon regarding what undoubtedly was a serious problem in early Christian communities. Acts 4:32-5:11 gives a specific instance of the possible dangers wealthy believers brought to any congregation. The great prophets of Israel, Amos, Isaiah and Micah had railed against the same economic inequities and injustices. Exilic and post-exilic Israel faced similar problems. In this, they differed not at all from modern western civilization, which gave rise to the inequities of capitalist economies and socialist class struggles for a more equitable distribution of wealth. The reality still exists for contemporary Christian churches. The temptation to favour the better dressed, or better spoken is perennial. Verses 5-7 set out God’s will in this regard in another series of rhetorical questions. Christian are called to demonstrate a different set of values. James puts this in a scriptural context in verse 8-11 and then summarises his argument in verses 12-13. Injustice brings judgment, not on the basis of human economic standards, but on God’s sense of equity and justice. Beginning in verse 14, James deals with the implications for faith of this ethical principle. Faith that does not produce good works is a false faith. An intellectual religious commitment without corresponding changes to one’s moral life cannot be a saving faith. Some interpreters have drawn a sharp distinction between Paul’s theology of grace alone and James’ theology of faith plus works. Others have made a similar distinction between Judaism and Christianity. These are both false antitheses. True faith should lead to works of righteousness as evidence of good fruit (see Matthew 7:15-20). Contrary to what some claim, Paul did not proclaim a doctrine of justification by faith alone without any subsequent response to demonstrate that justification had brought about changed behaviour. In fact, Paul clearly rejected such a view as blasphemous (Romans 3:8 and 6:1-2).

Mark 7:24-37 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith

7²⁴ And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon.^[a] And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.²⁷ And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”²⁸ But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”²⁹ And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.”³⁰ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Jesus Heals a Deaf Man

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And Jesus^[b] charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Footnotes: a. Some manuscripts omit *and Sidon*. b. Greek *he*.

COMMENT: Two healing miracles, at least one of them on foreign territory, gave rise to instructions from Jesus to keep his presence and his power secret. The attempt at secrecy failed as verse 36 demonstrates. Tyre was an important Mediterranean seaport in what is now Lebanon. Originally an island, it was connected to the mainland by a great mole built by Alexander during his siege of the city in 333 BC. Jesus had been there before (Mark 3:8). He may have gone there to visit someone he knew. In any small community, gossip would have made his presence known. He wanted to keep his visit a secret (verse 24b), but to no avail. We can assume that Jesus' host was a Jew, but his neighbours included many Gentiles, as was the Syrophenician woman who came to him pleading for her daughter to be healed. Neither the disease nor the demon (which according to contemporary belief had caused it), nor the manner of healing interested Mark. He chose to emphasise the conversation between the woman and Jesus. The narrative reveals a particular aspect of Jesus' humanity: his willingness to be convinced, even by a Gentile woman, that God's saving love extended beyond the covenanted people of Israel. This could well have been a significant issue for Mark's audience, particularly if they were a mix of Jews and Gentiles. The second miracle (verses 31-35) occurred after Jesus had returned from Tyre. It is curious that he “went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Decapolis.” That was quite a voyage to make on foot. Sidon is north of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast, about 40 miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Decapolis lies southeast of the Sea of Galilee across the Jordan valley. He certainly was taking the long road home. Mark may be pointing out for the benefit of his audience that it was not unusual for Jesus, a Jew from Galilee, to traverse and minister in Gentile territory. The central message of this story is the miracle itself and presents the modern reader with the same question it posed for the original audience for whom Mark wrote: who is this Jesus of Nazareth? The miracles that so amazed people then and still trouble us now, probably for very different reasons, describe transcendent events. These were not merely good deeds by an exceptionally skilled, charismatic and caring healer. They caused everyone then – and they still cause us – to choose either to believe or disbelieve that Jesus is as Mark proclaimed in the very first words of his gospel: “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Psalm 125 *Qui confidunt* Grail Psalter

℟ The Lord surrounds his people.

¹ *A Song of Ascents.*

Those who put their trust in the Lord
are like Mount Zion, that cannot be shaken,
that stands for ever. **℟**

² Jerusalem! The mountains surround her,
so the Lord surrounds his people
both now and for ever. **℟**

³ For the sceptre of the wicked shall not rest
over the land of the just
for fear that the hands of the just
should turn to evil. **℟**

⁴ Do good, Lord, to those who are good,
to the upright of heart;

⁵ but the crooked and those who do evil,
drive them away!

On Israel, peace! **℟**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :
and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This is another of the Songs of Ascent, most likely sung by pilgrims approaching Jerusalem and the temple. Mountains do indeed surround Jerusalem as vs. 2 states. This provides a fitting symbol for the protection God provides for Israel. The rest of the psalm restates Israel's religious tradition: righteousness that fulfils the nation's covenant relationship with God.

Post Communion

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy; and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall, keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, establish, strengthen and settle you in the faith; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**