

Trinity 14. 2 September 2021.

Collect

Almighty God, whose only Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence: give us pure hearts and steadfast wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; 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.

(or)

Merciful God, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross: may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Post Communion

Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

James 2:1-10 & 14-17. Warning against Partiality

2 My brothers and sisters,^[a] do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?^[b]
2 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,³ 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',^[c] 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.^[d] 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?⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'
⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹For 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. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.

Faith without Works Is Dead

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters,^[e] if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and 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? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7:24-end

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.[g] 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.

Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

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.[h] 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."

Sermon. The Gospel is a Verb. Revd David Treharne

Reading Mark it seems that the gospel is a verb... a doing word. In fact it's several verbs: teach, heal, listen, touch, feed, transform. This Gospel is action... God's love in the person of Jesus Christ tangibly active in people's lives and a whole myriad of circumstances. Quite appropriate when you put the book of James... faith in action... into the equation!

This is extraordinarily good news; that God is active and working. He wants us to be whole, and transformed... and God demonstrates that in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Today we have the story of the Syro Pheonician woman (God acts eventually!!!) and the deaf man with the speech impediment, but we can easily add to the list.

The Good News of this gospel here has two sides. The first is that God's love is boundless, accessible by all, available to us in every challenge, in every moment of pain or difficulty: light in the darkness, strength in weakness, hope in despair.

But the second side is that we ourselves are called to enact this gospel, to remember and demonstrate that the gospel is a verb. One piece I was reading put it like this... we need 'to be gospeled', for God's love and mercy and light and life to do its work in us. We need to be gospeled, but we also need to 'gospe...lize...' to extend that love, mercy, light and life to others. Divine love and life we have received... love and life passed on. Forgiveness received, forgiveness passed on. Light and hope received. Light and hope passed on, shared and lived out.

The letter of James is emphatic on this point of the gospel being not only received and believed, but LIVED OUT: 'faith, without works, is dead' James 2:17. This author was tired of people who claimed to follow Jesus behaving as though believing was enough. He had watched far too many people in need come to the Christian community, only to be ignored in favour of the wealthy and well connected; in favour of the 'in crowd.' If your face fitted you were in. If it didn't/doesn't fit, "then crawl back under the rock over there!"

What a challenge to me/us with the new housing around us. What a challenge when we are extraordinary consumers of food, drink, clothing etc... but then say we don't have money to give away to others, and my/our charitable generosity is like a restaurant tip.

What a challenge in the light of the ongoing issues with the migrants and refugees. What a challenge when our brothers and sisters in Christ in Afghanistan, North Korea, China and so many other places are being persecuted.

James wanted his readers to remember the whole gospel, not just the believing / intellectual / mind and doctrine part... to remember our moral and spiritual responsibilities one human being to another without partiality.

Despite the mess and outrage at what happened in Afghanistan there is fear and worry about refugees from 'there' and elsewhere coming 'here' and causing problems in 'our'

society. Whilst we can't solve the world's problems and it does cause our disruption to our way of life... there are surely things we can do. But to do anything we will have to face it that the gospel message challenges deeply ingrained prejudice. Let's face it, most of us (including me) don't like contemplating the thought of our world of relative comfort and civility being disturbed by poor, demanding people from 'over there' 'coming here' with all 'their' problems! "Why can't someone else sort it out? It's not our fault!"

God, in Jesus Christ comes to our poverty with the riches of his grace and we freely receive... and we freely pass on?? Faith in Christ Jesus has to work out in action somehow both abroad and at home. Good and right doctrine, belief and faith leads to good and right living and action... and politics, whatever the colour of the party.

I'm proud of what the Church has done and continues to do to assist the most needy folk around the world. From Mother Teresa like characters working in the slums, to Barnabas Fund working with persecuted Christians, to CMS, Tearfund and Cafod and others working to improve the lives of those most in need. I know some of you have been involved in amazing humanitarian projects.

Yet at the same time the church has spent an enormous amount of time and energy over the centuries arguing about beliefs and doctrinal minor details and making its pronouncements in its synods... that navel gazing that can happen in committee... whilst turning its gaze from everyday need and living out faith in everyday life.

James is clear. Faith MUST be seen in what we do, not what we say. The gospel is a verb.

I seem to recall one theologian putting it this way: "Don't tell me what you believe; tell me what difference it makes that you believe."

Jesus, when confronted by a person who came from outside his comfort zone, did not go away to the hills to study the matter; he shifted and enlarged his understanding on the spot, and did what the person needed God incarnate to do.

We are challenged to move ourselves from narrow perception to broad perception, to understand that God's love is for everyone, and that we are agents of that love. We receive and we pass on!

To be agents of God's love means to remember that the gospel is a verb, and act accordingly.

Verbs, of course, come in two categories: 'doing' and 'being.' For those of us who don't know when to stop, and feel guilty when we rest... 'being' is a verb too! We can't 'do' our faith every minute of every day. We must also take the time to 'be'; to breathe, rest, pray, listen, be still. (Doing then flows from being). Jesus did this regularly, in the midst of an extraordinary schedule. If all we do is run from action verb to action verb, there are some other verbs we'll encounter... 'flop', 'fail,' 'collapse' and 'die.'

There is an urgency to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark; he is constantly on the move, relentlessly demonstrating the kingdom of God he proclaims. It can be both exhilarating and exhausting to read and to imagine, and for those of us who follow Jesus, it sets a high bar. If we accept that the gospel is a verb, we might feel a relentless pressure to be doing something all the time, as Jesus appears to do in Mark and a danger of disproportionate responsibility. But Jesus also takes the time to renew himself through rest and prayer. In fact he surrenders himself to the Father's will and opens himself up to the Holy Spirit which enables him to do the work... not in his own human strength but with and in the power of the Spirit.

So look around and wisely discern where is the gospel verb needed? Who is hungry? Who is lost? Who needs a helping hand? What verb are you called to be for those in our community, our church, our family, our circle of influence, our work place?

God has given you gifts that you are called to share, no matter who you are. You can volunteer in church and in the community. You can teach someone to knit; you can cook a meal to be shared; you can fix a car; you can share your talents in music, art or writing, you can wash linen, you can write a letter or email that encourages hearts; you can lift heavy things or help someone to support a heavy burden. You can listen. You can offer the wisdom of your years or the energy of your youth. You can bless and forgive. You can pray pray pray! You can write a cheque or make an electronic transfer that will change lives. You can choose a green energy tariff. You can support your Parish Council and lobby your MP. You can serve refreshments, offer hospitality and give a lift. You can step out of your comfort zone and individualism and be part of community. With just one or two kind actions you can change your community; some people may have what it takes to change the world. All you have to do is decide that you, yourself, are a gospel verb.

Are you listening to what the Spirit is saying to you and the Church today? BE OPEN!

To conclude: Has anyone watched the film or read the book 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin?' Near the beginning of the film a man comes to the village doctor complaining that he cannot hear – the doctor finds a dried pea stuck in his ear – it has been there for years. he takes out the pea, and the man is cured. Later at the end of the film the man returns to the doctor – he has been overwhelmed with the nagging of his wife back home. And jokingly but also seriously he asks the doctor to put the pea back in his ear?

Brothers and sisters the call of God is amazing but it can be hard to hear and receive sometimes. Don't put the pea back in the ear!!! Yes, it may be hard and tough, to open our eyes, ears, mouths, wallets and hearts, and we may prefer to close ears and eyes back up again... but the rewards are amazing and transformative.