

Sermon – Port Macquarie – 5/6th September 2009 – James 2:1-14 & Mark 7:31-13:

Dance to the beat of Jesus:

An old boatman painted the word “faith” on one oar of his boat and “works” on the other. He was asked his reason for this. In answer, he slipped the oar with “faith” into the water and rowed. The boat, of course, made a very tight circle. Returning to the dock, the boatman then said, “Now, let’s try ‘works’ without ‘faith’ and see what happens.” The oar marked “works” was put in place and the boatman began rowing with just the “works” oar. Again the boat went into a tight circle but in the opposite direction. When the boatman again returned to the wharf, he interpreted his experiment in these strong and convincing words, “You see, to make a passage across the lake, one needs both oars working simultaneously in order to keep the boat in a straight and narrow way. If one does not have the use of both oars, he makes no progress, neither across the lake, nor as a Christian.

Today in our gospel we have the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman, who approached Jesus to have him heal her daughter. This would have been a tough call for this woman for she was seen by the Jews as an outcast a gentile, a lowlife. So for her to approach Jesus, a Jew who knew all the traditions, was really putting herself in a vulnerable position. She had heard about Jesus and had come to believe in him but with out exercising that faith she would have missed out.

Jesus at first seems to show favoritism by stating “Verse 24 *“And he said unto her, let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs.”*

By Jewish tradition she had no right to approach Jesus, how ever the woman replies in a way that indicates that she has heard of Jesus. *“But she answered and said to him, yes, Lord; even the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.”*

The woman was showing that she had faith in Jesus and had faith in him. The crumbs that she had gleaned had shone the light of Jesus into her life and she received her reward, the healing of her daughter.

So in our second healing encounter Jesus heals a man who was deaf. In ancient times there were no speech therapists or Medicare so those thus affected usually ended up as social outcasts and one of the poor. So Jesus actions again show his love for the disadvantaged, something the Religious and Upper classes failed to do and I think that this is what Jesus is challenging the Pharisees with, their failure to look after the poor, rather than holding up his Jewishness.

Also with the healing of the man who was deaf there was an act of faith. The man's friends brought him to Jesus to be healed, for they begged Jesus to lay his hands on him. They had heard about Jesus but with out putting it into use they too would not have obtained the result that they looked for – the healing of their friend.

When a person is born deaf they quite often have a problem with speech. Not because they are necessarily born without the ability, but rather because they do not pick up on the communication with parents and siblings. They may in time be able to converse but usually in a reduced capacity.

On receiving his healing from Jesus the man was able to speak and could not help his self for he told all about what Jesus had done for him thus his response was an outward sign of the healing of body & spirit that he had received. In these two events plus in other such as the healing of the Rulers Daughter and the Centurion's Servant Jesus showed no partiality in his ministry to those in need. He looked not at the physical but at the spiritual and saw the faith f those before him. He was teaching us the steps of life in him we also need to take.

James tells us that faith in Christ, the Lord of Glory, is not compatible with partiality in human relations. We are not to show favoritism however our text then goes on to list a variety of ways in which believers might typically display such favoritism.

In James chapter 2 verse 14ff we read:-

*“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?
If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,*

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 is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?"

Then James in verse one of chapter 2 points out that we are in danger of being like the Pharisees if we show partiality to people, especially those who look well healed and well off – the physically rich. We humans like things to go well and so can tend to gravitate to those who appear to have it all together and going well for them.

However in doing this, as James points out, we tend to ignore or marginalize those who are not so well off and look to be down on their luck. In doing this we are judging by external appearance rather than internal appearance which as we have seen in the gospel reading are what Jesus reacted to.

I know in the past I have been guilty of this course of action, especially whilst involved in the Insurance Industry for it encourages that life style and partiality. It encourages one to associate with the tall poppies and high achievers. Unfortunately some of the so called tall poppies turned out to be inscrutable or crooked, and I soon learned that those not so high up the ladder often had more to offer in the long run.

So when we follow this course of action and discriminate it is wrong, the bible says that it is a sin, for as we read in verses 5 to 7 of James:

"Listen, 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?"

But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?"

Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"

What Jesus and James are pointing out is that all people are to be treated equally and with equal measure. Yet we seem to focus incorrectly on those who are physically rich but who may be spiritually poor rather than on the poor who often have a greater spiritual awareness of their need for God in Christ. The Syro Phoenician woman and the deaf man acknowledged their need for Jesus where as the Religious and Rich did not.

We are told in Deuteronomy 25 verse 13ff that we are not to operate with differing weights, in other words differing standards.

"You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.

You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small.

A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly are an abomination to the Lord your God."

Therefore treating people who come to this church or in our social circles with differing standards, is in opposition to Gods ways, and when we operate with differing standards/differing weights, we are showing that our faith in Jesus is hollow or false and that we are out of step with his way of life. We are showing that we can know the scripture but we are not prepared to live by it thus our stated faith is dead.

Verse 8 ff *"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.*

But if you show partiality, you are committing 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 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.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment."

I feel that this is a good wake up call for all of us to check on how we treat people, are we doing all we can to bring all people into the kingdom of God or are we cherry picking and only siding up to the rich and famous. It is hard at times to approach some folk, but our texts today says that that is what we need to do if we are true to our faith in Jesus.

Here at St Thomas we are, in the main, a friendly and welcoming church and this is as it should be, but our welcoming needs to ensure that it is open to all people regardless of ethnic background, colour or social status. Next week we have back to church Sunday followed in a few weeks the JAAL outreach and hopefully we will see many come to St Thomas seeking a way to connect with Jesus. If we show partiality then we will be giving the wrong signals to those who come and we will be in danger of turning them away. How sad that would be.

Many here watch the dancing type shows, dancing with the stars etc, where people are taught to dance are then called upon to put into action what they had learnt in the weeks prior. Jesus in his dealings with the Syro-Phoenician woman, the man who was deaf, the rich ruler, the centurion plus the many others we read about, was showing us the steps we need to take in relation to the rhythm of life he provides. James then tells us that knowing the dance, the steps and the tune is okay but if it is real and have meaning or purpose then we need to get onto the dance floor and show that we in tune with him.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ if we say that we are followers of Jesus and accept his teaching we need to walk the talk at all times and with all people we come into contact with treating them with equal measure. We need to have both oars in the water working in unison otherwise we will keep going around in ever decreasing circles and end up on the rocks of irrelevance.

So let each one of us leave this place walking in and by the faith we profess in Jesus, dancing to the rhythm of life tha he has placed in our hearts, and take his message of love, forgiveness, mercy and God's immeasurable grace to the spiritual poor, all of them.

In the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. AMEN

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