

A FAITH THAT HELPS

IN TIMES OF CONFLICT



Message

Today we continue with our September series on the letter of James, concentrating on, "Faith that works when life doesn't". Interesting....

Just before we begin to look at James' message, I must mention the Gospel reading of the day, because it is one of my all time favorites.

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith. This woman was a Phoenician from Syria. She was a gentile, and had a very strong faith, so strong that it enables her to stand up to Jesus, in the nicest way of course. She was begging Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. Jesus said to her, "Let the children be fed first", (meaning the people of God, should receive blessings and healing first) "for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (meaning that the gentiles were not worthy as they were not the people of God, as the Israelites were. So, really, he was calling the gentiles dogs). This sounds very harsh, however this is what happened in this developing culture concerning the Israelites and the Gentiles. The woman very politely answers Jesus, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs". Then Jesus says to her, "For saying, that you may go - the demon has left your daughter".

So the woman goes home and finds her child on the bed and the demon has gone. This woman certainly had a very strong faith, I guess because her daughter was so ill she was persistent, Jesus initially had given a very negative response to the woman, but, she replied and Jesus obviously respected her quick wit and heals the child. Around this time in the Gospels we find the beginning of the turn around, where the Gentiles and all the nations of the world are invited into the family of God.

Last week Rev Mel focused on "Developing a faith that isn't troubled by troubles." Rev Mel began by talking about the earthquake, a few weeks ago now, and how the tremors of life impact upon us, disrupting everything around us. Who can we turn to for help and support? Of course we will find messages of hope and consolation as we turn to the Scriptures, especially the book of James. And today we will consider James' message, hearing and doing the Word. We shall reflect on, "Developing a faith that helps us in times of conflict", with the main focus on relationships.

Relationships are one of the most important elements in our life; we are relational beings, continually interacting with each other in so many ways as we travel on our journey through this life. We form relationships continually, with health professionals, doctors, dentists, etc. With people on the checkout at the supermarket, wait staff at restaurants, and all sorts of other people. These relationships are very casual, however it is still an interaction with another person. And then we move on to the more permanent, deeper relationships, the relationship that we have with family members, our partner, siblings and other relatives. We also have relationships with our

friends, some may go back to school days, some may be recent but never the less, deep and meaningful as we support and encourage each other.

Our most important relationship of course is our relationship with God, once we have this relationship sorted, everything will fall into place, He is always by our side no matter what happens in our lives.

So here we have a multitude of different relationships, appropriate relationships according to the depth of each individual interaction, and with these relationships so many opportunities for misunderstandings and conflict!! We think we communicate well, but sometimes we don't. And the message is misunderstood and misread causing all sorts of problems and conflicts.

In our scripture sentence for today: the Apostle James writes, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires". Repeat...

We all have two ears and one mouth which indicates to me that we should listen twice as much as we speak, we should probably listen lots more that we speak. We need to really listen, not just hear the words. It is often a good idea to repeat the words back to the person in a slightly different way eg, if someone said, I have had a terrible night, I tossed and turned all night. You might reply, so you had trouble sleeping? Then they will expand on that and one can really understand what the person is saying, and can respond appropriately.

James takes us to another level; he says we are to be doers of the word, not merely hearers. We need to rid ourselves of all wickedness and welcome with humbleness the Word of God, the Word that has the power to save our souls. James continues, "But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing". Through this message, through understanding of the Word and doing the Word we will develop a faith that can support us through times of conflict.

As we read the scriptures, especially the NT, we can develop a clear picture of how Jesus lived his life, and as Christian people we are drawn to follow Him, to try and copy Him in our own lives, a close relationship with Jesus will bring us peace and joy, a bubbling joy that makes us want to share this joy with others in harmonious relationships.

There will always be conflicts and misunderstandings, however it is how we react, that can settle the situation and allow us together to find solutions. We will mostly have to compromise in a difficult conflict and often agree to disagree while maintaining respect, care and support for the other party.

I often experienced conflict in the workplace when I worked in the disability field, especially with parents who were concerned about their adult children with a disability as these young adults and some not so young, navigated their way through the world, with appropriate support.

[Tell story... photo of puppy.]

In any difficult situation before I do anything I always think to myself what would Jesus do, how would He handle this situation. I think we all know the answer, He would respond with kindness and gentleness, displaying a sense of peace, love and calmness, always listening intently to the others opinion, while working towards a fair solution. In all difficult situations of conflict and disagreement, pray to Jesus, allow him to calm the storm and empower you with his wisdom and understanding. God is always there waiting and watching, we are his precious children, He will not desert us in times of need.

Day by day as we pray, read the scriptures and connect with God, our relationship with Him grows and strengthens. Always trust that Jesus is with us even though sometimes He may feel far away.

Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.
Reminds me of a song I once heard !!!!!

AMEN

Personal Reflection Questions

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. From reading James 1:19-27, Can list below what you see as some characteristics of righteousness and Christlikeness versus characteristics of unrighteousness and sin.

Christlike Virtues	Vices or Sins
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19)? Take a minute to confess these things to God.
3. Read James 1:21-25. What are some things you observe about how we should and shouldn't respond to God's Word (the Bible)?
4. In 1:26-27, James gives specific instances for how we can be doers of the Word. What examples does he give? How might we live these out in our own day?
5. Of all the vices/sins and virtues from 1:19-27, which one or two are you most in need of God's help to put off and put on? What are ways God has and will equip you to fight these specific sins and to obey Him in these specific areas of Christlike behaviour?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are potential negative effects of speaking too quickly or not listening well?
2. How is our anger often connected to wanting our will, agenda, and plan to happen? How might a focus on God's agenda being lived out help us respond in temptation toward anger?
3. James connects our receiving the Word (1:21) with part of how we put off sins of the flesh (1:19-20). Why is abiding with Christ through the Word of God an essential aspect of "putting away" (1:21) sin and growing in Christ?
4. What are specific, intentional things we (individually, as a family, in the church) can do to take steps in being doers and not just hearers of the Word?
5. We could summarize "the gospel" as the saving news that God sent Jesus to die for our sin so we can be reconciled to God through Jesus and given new life, not because of anything we deserve but freely as a gift we receive by faith. What role does the gospel play in helping us live the life described in 1:19-27?
6. Where do you need encouragement, accountability, or prayer to live out 1:19-27?

JAMES DEVOTIONAL

Don't forget the James devotional is also available for reflection. While each week may not correspond exactly to the Sunday readings, this devotional will assist you to step through James more slowly and in a deeper way.

