

# FAITH THAT TRANSFORMS

WEAKNESS INTO STRENGTH



The strongest in the kingdom is the one who serves

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy to be here, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pentecost growth, that we can come together to worship, have fellowship and give thanks for the many blessings that our loving heavenly Father continues to bestow on us all.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Once again, I take great comfort and confidence from today's readings, that again challenges our attitudes and understandings, causing us to think deeply on the passages of today's readings from Holy Scripture, and how we can apply those teachings to our daily lives!

So on with today's message, starting with, the passage from the book of Job!

I don't know about you, but my attitude to this book, over the years, has changed from one of, I suppose of being "*forced to read it*" to the now "*ah! the penny has dropped!*" and the joy of "*understanding of the message*" of this wonderful story about a righteous man, Job and his understanding of God.

For instance, we gather the truth from today's reading, that:

- Firstly, that there is an unbridgeable gap between divine and human knowledge, and whilst we may dislike our inability to penetrate the mysteries of God, at some point we are better off if we accept the reality of our human limitations. *Amen to that!*
- And secondly, that our relationship of trust with God is more important than answers to our questions of *Why?*

Even if Job knew the answers to his questions, he would not be satisfied with an intellectual solution.

*Isn't that so true of us?*

Job's deeper need was to know that God had not abandoned him, that God still cared for him. *What a message of assurance for us!* How true is it that, for those of us who suffer, is the need, for *"is a visit from God."*

On a personal note, that is what Kairos prison ministry is for me and our many supporters, it's all about helping and serving, or as one would say, an active faith, as our reflections from the letter of James tell us. Bringing God's love and the message of forgiveness and promise of hope for a better future with a life in Christ!

The *'building up of a community of faith'* on both sides of the *'barbed wire fence!'*

That's the message from our final text of the letter of James is about, *'building up of a community of faith'* and developing a faith that turns weakness into strength. As the hymn goes, *Let the weak say, I am strong!*

For the men inside encouraging them to form prayer and share groups to support each, pray for each other in their many times of need. All the things of care and active love, that we, as a community of faith do on the outside for our families, our communities for the lonely, the homeless, for the refugees, for the prisoners, for those who society shuns!

The same point comes through regardless, that members of the Christian Community, each bear a mutual responsibility for each other.

That we be involved in each other's lives, helping each other in our physical and spiritual journeys. As St James says, the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective, or as our Kairos motto puts it Listen, Listen, Love, Love.

And this leads us to our Gospel reading from St Mark.

As the true meaning of discipleship unfolds to the disciples, Mark shows how it is possible for profound misunderstanding to remain with this request to Jesus, **"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory"**.

James and John don't yet understand the service that will be demanded of the Christian disciple. Their request is marked by self-seeking, and their focus is the future, when all the *"hard stuff"* will be over, and they will be on *"the winning side"*.

Their concept of *"the winning side"* has not been influenced at all by the conversation they have just had, (Mark 10:32-35), in which Jesus tries to tell them what must happen to him.

The other disciples are indignant with James and John, so that Jesus has to sit them all down and tell them, in very simple language, what the values of a Christian disciple are to be.

Jesus' first reply is that it is not up to him, to assign this priority to the disciples. The only priority Jesus can offer is the suffering and death of the follower who gives themselves as a martyr.

The "cup" is the destiny of a person's life while the "baptism" is their misfortune and suffering. Both describe the renunciation demanded of the Christian disciple.

Then Jesus points out that there is a new norm of priority in the Christian Community. It is a unique group, with no parallel in any other human society, and its priority values are unique.

To use the title of great book on discipleship, that I have read, by Don Kraybill, It's an "Upside-Down Kingdom". Kingdom values are the opposite of worldly values

Whereas in other groups, such as a civil, state, the great people lord it over their inferiors! I remember well, during my early days in the heavy steel industry, the wrong perception, of how those above us were referred to as "our superiors"! This sought of implied a class type control over the workforce and caused much antagonism!

This however must never be the case amongst Christians!

Priority is given to the one who serves most, who emulates their Master whom they follow.

For Jesus, who is the leader of all Christians, gave himself in service even to death.

Let me finish today's message with the words from the song *Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; "pray that I may have the grace, to let you be my servant too. Amen"*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are commands, imperatives, or things to do or not do in 5:7-12?
2. In what ways does a farmer wait with patience while still being active? How might this be a good illustration for what it looks like for us to be faithful while waiting on God?
3. Read James 5:14-18. What do you notice or observe about prayer from this section?
4. What are specific ways you can pray for others and with others?
5. What is one personal application or takeaway for you from 5:7-20?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is James encouraging his suffering readers to be patient? What are they being patient for, and what enables them to be patient?
2. How is praying together and for one another an example of active waiting (5:7-11)?
3. What are some things from 5:14-16 we see about how to pray together as believers?
4. While our sin is against God and we confess to Him (Ps. 51:4), we often also need to confess our sins to fellow believers close to us (James 5:16). What are reasons we might need to do this and blessings that can come from it?
5. Read James 5:19-20; Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1. Why do we need other believers for encouragement and accountability? What are ways we can better engage in giving and receiving this kind of encouragement and accountability from one another?
6. As those who confess sins (5:16) and walk in grace and truth rather than sin (5:19-20), how do we continually return to and root ourselves in the work of Jesus for us?