

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 5th September 2021

Scriptures: NRSV **James 2:1-17** *Faith & works without favouritism*

¹My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ²For 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, ³and 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,' ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. 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? ⁶But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷Is 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. ¹⁴What good is it my brothers and sisters 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.

Reflection:

How easy it is to have favourites! Those who are like minded and clean of dress and speech are easy to get along with and pleasant company. But what about those whose clothes are worn, hair dishevelled, unshaven, and radiating an unpleasant odour? One day during an open time for people to come into the church for prayer, a man entered and sat in the back pew. His hair was long and unruly, his beard and moustache were also long and untrimmed, stained orange around the lips and contained unsavoury bits of stuff. His light coloured raincoat was also stained and fraying round the edges, as were his shoes and the bottoms of his trousers. He smelt strongly of alcohol, mixed with other odours and his nose needed a good blowing! All-in-all his presence did not inspire any of the prayer team to approach him, quite the opposite; they all retreated to the back hall! A lady quietly praying in a pew three rows down turned round and stared, put her handkerchief over her nose and hurriedly left the church. I asked the man if he would like prayer and his response was cutting, "No amount of prayer can help me, leave me alone!" The prayer team wanted me to ask him to leave but my heart was aching for him so I withdrew to keep watch nearby silently praying in the spirit. After a few minutes he looked up and asked if we had anything for him to drink. I made him a coffee (with 6 sugars!) as requested, gave it to him and sat down beside him trying not to show any negative reaction to the state he was in. He seemed to accept my presence and after a few minutes sitting in silence together I asked him why he thought prayer could not help him. He said, "What I've done God will not forgive", so I assured him that God forgives every repentant heart because He loves us and wants to restore us to wholeness no matter how bad we've been and asked him what he had done. At this he broke down, buried his head into my shoulder and started sobbing uncontrollably.

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The smell was overwhelming and his nose produced still more unsavoury mucus but I kept silently praying as he clung to me. Eventually he regained control of himself, gratefully used the tissues I handed him and told me his story. In brief, he had been a soldier charged with the security of a munitions compound. The large unit of soldiers were surrounded by hostile villagers and needed to keep a watchful vigil 24/7, so he often found himself on watch during the heat of the day. On one such watch a villager jumped out of the bush and started to run toward the compound. He shouted for him to stop, but he just kept coming, so he kept shouting the warning to stop or be shot. When he saw the villager draw back his arm, he knew he was about to throw a grenade into the compound. If this happened the explosion would ignite all the ammunition and the whole unit would be blown to bits. He took his shot, which killed the villager instantly and sure enough the grenade rolled out of his hand and exploded where he fell. When they went out to inspect the villager and took off the scarf hiding his face, the man saw that he had shot and killed a boy of about 12 years of age. Although he had saved the many lives of the whole unit, he had never been able to forgive himself for taking the life of a boy. He had taken to drink to try and stop the nightmares but it did not help. Over the years his wife and family had left him he could not hold down a job and he was now roaming the streets begging for food and sleeping wherever he could find shelter without being moved on. We talked things through, I gave him some biscuits (all we had to offer) and more coffee, we examined some helpful Scriptures together and I discerned something within him slowly lifting. He gradually straightened up and his face grew brighter despite all the hair! I offered to get him a meal and clothe him from a nearby charity shop. He declined all offers and said he knew somewhere that he could get a shower and shave, if he turned up sober, but asked me to pray with him. He held my hands tightly as I prayed and afterward, he thanked me for listening and for the prayer and went on his way. The following week another stranger came into the church on our open prayer day and asked for me by name. Apparently, he was the one from the shelter who provided the shower and shave. He told me how he had seen the man many times but had not been able to help him because of his drunkenness. Then he told me how, as soon as the man had showered and shaved, he went directly to the job centre and took the first job he was offered. He was staying in the shelter until he could sort out a place to live and wanted me to know that God had forgiven him and that he had finally been able to forgive himself. This is the grace of God at work in those He loves and shows how important it is not to judge by outward appearance, lest we inadvertently miss God's opportunities or work against His purpose.

How many others are there in this cruel world who just need someone to recognise their pain and see beyond the veil? What would have happened if I had judged this man by how he looked, or smelt? What would have happened if I had rejected him instead of praying to God for help? How easy it is to judge a person and withhold the very thing that God has blessed us with and is asking us to give. God is watching us and Satan is ever busy trying to trip us up and cause us to fail so he can lay claim to our soul. Faith must always be accompanied by works! We cannot live in righteousness if we do not demonstrate what we believe. What we see with our physical eyes and hear with our physical ears (or smell!) is not the whole story; we are called to minister without fear or favour. Truth will only be revealed when we take the time and care to sit with each other, listen to each other and pray with each other. *Who might God be calling you to sit beside and listen to their story? What words*

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of Scripture might you be able to share to encourage them? Is our faith in harmony with our works or at discord with God?

There are those who live to give, and those who live to get, and still others who live to avoid having to make the choice! The first is good, the second is bad, and the third is not an option at all! Make no mistake: to know what God desires of us through His Word and the example of Jesus and yet not say or do anything to put this knowledge into action is a sin! We are to love our neighbours as ourselves. No one wants to be judged, rejected or ignored but all need to be accepted, valued and loved; this is our high command as God's people. Showing favouritism, whether by forming select like-minded groups, excluding those who are different or indulging in gossip, is to transgress and forfeit one's salvation. The Ten Commandments contain the whole law of God, which were summed up by Jesus in His 'New Commandment'. To say one thing and do another makes us a hypocrite! To disobey just one command of God, no matter how well we are keeping the others, is to transgress and fall into sin. We are accountable to God, through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity misses nothing! It is not enough to merely know what the Lord taught. To honour the name of Jesus we must demonstrate His teaching without partiality. *Who might we identify as being poor by worldly standards but rich in faith? Who might we identify as rich by worldly standards but poor in faith? Which of these will be blessed by God in abundance or found wanting on the day of divine judgement?*

There is only One True God and it is to Him that we are accountable and Him alone. Jesus has given sacrificially of His own divine life that we might be judged by God's grace and the law of free will, to obey or not to obey. When we show mercy, we will be shown mercy; when we exercise grace, we will receive grace. Christ-like Love is not a wishy-washy romantic notion; the love of God is strong to both discipline and praise; courageous in tearing down wrongdoing and building up righteousness. We must pray for the poor and needy as well as fill their stomachs and clothe their bodies. This is not limited to the physically poor and needy but those who need spiritual feeding and clothing as well. When a church needed to address urgent building issues, namely, a crumbling church and hall wall. A few faithfully committed themselves to much prayer and a 'Gift Day' miraculously provided the money to rebuild but no more. Now the building was complete, it was time to decorate. However, when contributions for materials and volunteers to paint were asked for, the stewards and treasurer replied by saying they would pray about it! Having spread doom and gloom before and throughout the whole building project, despite the miracle of donations, they still predicted it would fail. When the members who had been faithfully praying throughout heard of this they donated all the materials, donned overalls and got stuck in with brushes. I often wonder why those who constantly criticise with doom and gloom keep attending church! But then, Jesus did warn us about wolves in sheep's clothing? ([Matthew 7:15](#)). *Do we show mercy and apply grace to those in the Body of Christ? Is the love we preach about the same as the love we demonstrate? Is our faith applied with spiritual **and** physical practice or is it dead?*

God has chosen those poor by worldly values, to be rich in godly values. Such as these are the beloved of God who will inherit the promised Kingdom. *Are we among the rich or the poor?*

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Hymn/Song: Brother, Sister, let me serve you (*The Servant Song*) by Richard Gillard **SF 54**

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.

We are pilgrims on a journey
and companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Poem: FAITH! ©Janice Morgan 2016-January

Faith! A word that's illusive in meaning
It ebbs and flows in our logic of believing
Included in songs of worship and praise
When prayers of conviction and devotion we raise
Faith fills our hearts with assurance and joy
To manifest confidence is its central ploy
The prayer of faith is the way to be blessed
When all manner of sins to our Lord are confessed
The sick are healed; the guilty forgiven
The bond of reliance on God never riven
The prayer of the righteous is based on trust
Christ's suffering and death reveals Truth to the just
To pray for each other in faith and love
Invites the power of God's Spiritual dove
Who indwells our soul most mysteriously
With divine words of wisdom most seriously
God's people are anointed with His name
Absolved from the guilt of all sins and all blame
For faith is the gold; the bronze and silver
Of every hope of every believer.

Prayer: I pray that those reading this are blessed with the knowledge of God that makes them rich in Truth and righteousness, by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord; may it be so. **Amen!**