

St Edmunds 5th September 2021 – Julie Barham

James 2:1 -10 +, Mark 7:24 -37



In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Sometimes I despair, then I get angry. I found myself writing that on social media the other day when I read about a child not being allowed to do PE at school because their wheelchair tyres may mark the gym floor. Getting angry is a common thing. My husband said as much in his sermon last week – I should know – I listened to it twice within an hour what with zoom and everything. I hope you are impressed with my devotion! Yes, I know – twitter and other online sites are frequent causes of anger, but at least it’s not like not being able to get into a shop or business myself in real life – which makes me frustrated and a bit angry. The absence of dropped kerbs, people parking across them where they exist, narrow pavements full of stuff – don’t get me started. And I have designer wheelchairs and can express myself forcibly. Heaven help those who are discriminated against because of gender, race or other things that make them different – and cannot find the forum or strength to object as loudly.



In his letter that we have heard part of today, James gets “properly angry” about the way those who are poor and wearing dirty clothes are treated by those claiming to be Christians. “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” He goes on to write of those people with gold rings and in fine clothes who get treated

differently, with respect and a real welcome, as opposed to a poor person in dirty clothes.

James is arguing on two fronts that this is a bad idea, apart from common decency. He says that it is the poor that God has chosen to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, whereas it is the rich who oppress and take you to court? It's quite an argument for enlightened self interest if you think about it. The poor believe because they have nothing else, whereas the rich have options to behave badly towards people. I'm aware that this may sound like socialism, but it was James that wrote it first!



The other argument that James uses is that Christians obey “the royal law according to the scripture” “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” and that not to do so is a sin. It's tough stuff. If you treat the wealthy better based on appearance alone, you are not fulfilling the basics of Christianity, says James.

So what do we do with that idea? In a country where social care is being cut back? Where Universal Credit is being reduced this month? Where arguments about where Afghan refugees are to live is already bouncing around? I honestly don't know. Do I despair, then get angry?

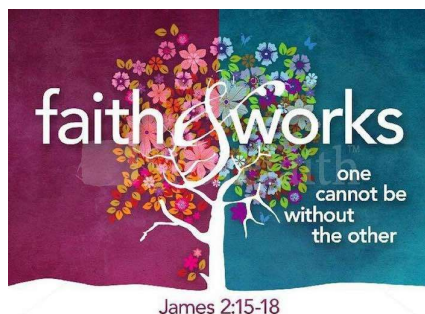


Let's look at the gospel. Mark writes in his brief, urgent style of a woman who approaches Jesus. A gentile woman, a non Jew. Her daughter is ill, she has, in Mark's words, a demon. Now, although I have picked up quite a bit of medical knowledge and I know something of illnesses that can affect children, I don't

know what that means. We do know that it is sufficiently bad for the woman to pluck up the courage to speak to Jesus. After all, he doesn't want to be disturbed, she is a woman and so less regarded in the first century society, and to make things worse she is not even a Jew., when Jesus has been preaching to Jews, helping Jews, in the main throughout his ministry. We don't know how he refused, maybe he was tired, angry, and did not want to be bothered. After all, we never get angry or fed up, too tired to speak to anyone. That's what Peter says anyway.

“Let the children be fed first” he says, rather than throw their food to the dogs. Ouch. That is a put down to the woman, possibly implying that his healing powers should be given to the Jews first. She responds with a decent come back though – “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs”. She is desperate remember, and it makes her brave and articulate. Even the dogs, not a much loved pampered pet but can hope for crumbs, for the leftovers. Even the gentiles, women, can hope for the leftovers of power, of healing. Jesus acknowledges her faith, her reasoning, and announces “For saying that you may go – the demon has left your daughter” and the child, the girl is healed. Is it a reward for fast thinking, or is it the healing power of Jesus overflowing anyway? We don't know.

I think that it is interesting, that Jesus has a mini debate with a woman over his power. The story of the woman with the issue of blood that believes merely touching Jesus' cloak will make her well is told that it is her faith that makes her well when others would cast her out. The Samaritan woman, the member of a disliked tribe, is shown Jesus' knowledge and compassion despite her differences. Did the gospel writers choose these stories because they were just good examples of Jesus power? Or is it that they were trying to make the point that Jesus' love and compassion was for both everyone, whatever their background, gender or difference?



James in the end of this reading of verses picked out of the second chapter of the letter - this is definitely a time to read the whole thing – goes on to write of the need for faith with works. If someone is without clothes and food, he says, it is no good telling them to be at peace, warm and well fed. “What is the good of that?” he asks. Faith without works, according to James, is no good “to man nor Beast” as we say at home. Jesus backed up his preaching and teaching with healing, with feeding people, with making a real difference in people’s lives.

Where does this leave us? We can believe in Jesus, God, in our society, our country, that is still allowed, even encouraged. We can choose to come to church, take part in online services, be together to celebrate our faith in some ways. That, as we have been reminded in recent weeks with the takeover of Afghan, is a privilege not enjoyed by everyone in our world. And even if it is, what about those in our country who are unable to concentrate on faith or belief because they are too busy trying to make ends meet, trying to survive financially, without the basics of food, adequate housing, the resources to afford school uniform for their children.



July's foodbank collection

Do we despair, get angry? Do we try to make a difference, make our feelings known? Do we help with food, clothes, accommodation? I really don't know the answers. We do what we can? We have faith, how do we do the works? There is a collection point for practical help for Afghan refugees at St Anne's church in Derby. There is space in Primrose's shed for food for the food bank. There are various ways of contacting our MPs, our representatives. Our faith can make a difference in our lives, let us pray to be shown how to make a difference in the lives of others. Amen.

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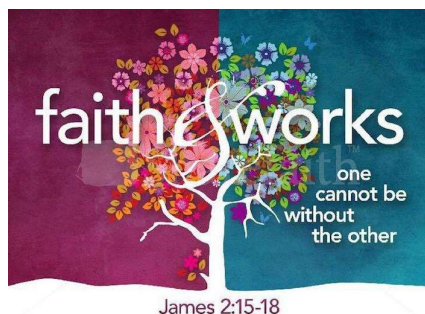


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