

It is our attitude, not the singing or the sermon that is a worship to God. Our attitude as praise to God goes beyond Sunday morning – it creeps into our daily lives and our interactions with everyone around us. It becomes a decision and an action and a way of being faithful everyday.

Let me relay to you some wise council from the letter that James the Just – leader of the church in Jerusalem, half brother and servant of the Lord Jesus the Christ wrote to the preachers and teachers who were sharing the Gospel with the Jews in exile. I will also read this from the Message

### **James 1:17-27 (The Message)**

16-18 So, my very dear friends, don't get thrown off course. Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures.

Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear.

God's righteousness doesn't grow from human wrath. So, throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage.

In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.

Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other.

Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life! —even out of the corner of the eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.

People who set themselves up as "religious" by talking a good game are self-deceived. This kind of worship is hot air and only hot air. Real worship, the kind that passes muster before God, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

The Letter of James has been read as a kind of Christian wisdom literature – like Proverbs or Job. It sounds like a teacher who wants his students to live their everyday lives well, that is, with integrity, in line with what they believe. James does not focus his letter on evangelism, on spreading the good news – of apologetics – instead he is writing to Christians, and his point is that we need to let God's word, already implanted in our hearts, have its full effect in our lives.

In this letter *faith* and *works* are not opposed; they're not even disconnected. The truly wise, truly faithful individual is known not by what they say they believe, but in how they live what they believe. So, in today's text, James is talking about - being doers and not just hearers – walking the talk, not just

talking the talk. Not earning our salvation or ever thinking that we could but letting God's word "have its full effect in our lives."

Perhaps one of our greatest struggles now in Western Christianity is the standoff between those who think that they are right – which is pretty much everyone. I had an interesting debate last week with some people about our interpretation of specific scripture texts. I differed from the person's particular point of view.

For me, that was ok to differ – in fact, it got me all invigorated because then I thought – wow, now we can have a real discussion and get down to the nitty gritty of what we believe and why! But for the other person it seemed that my point of view was wrong and that closed the discussion.

See, where I'm coming from is this: if we both claim our opinion is based on scriptural, prayer and community discernment – does one opinion have to be wrong so the other can be right? Can't we both be right and leave the judgement to God? Can we not learn from each other? I'm still working on this – I'm hoping that by the time I'm an Oma I will be proficient at accepting and loving others despite my differences with them.

In Mark's passage today we find Jesus' list of things that defile from the heart. He lists things that we are all guilty of – sometimes every day: mean looks, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. And this list is right there included with the obscenities, lusts, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, depravity, deceptive dealings, and carousing. How often do we give those with whom we disagree "mean looks" and we slander our neighbour to another, and we walk around as if we know it all – and we might – and that is arrogance and foolishness?

Think about it. It defiles the heart – and it wrecks the community when we slander and give mean looks and are arrogant and haughty. Think about it. Is that the way that Jesus wants us to live?

Is it pride to claim the moral high ground – to arrogantly think that we are right - because of one set of issues? And if we spend too much time disagreeing on points of theology and dogma, and how science fits in with religion - aren't we forgetting or even intentionally overlooking and denying what God is really requiring from us?

We hear over and over throughout the Bible – from the Hebrew Scripture, from Jesus' message and throughout the epistles AND Revelation that our faith and life are shallow and fruitless when "the homeless and the loveless" Or, as we commonly read – when plight of the widows, orphans and sojourners in our midst are ignored" (Zechariah 7:8-14)

What does that tell us about what matters to God?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19th century American philosopher and poet says, "Go put your creed into your deed. What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say."

Living faithfully everyday means that our insides match our outsides. Or, to put it in other language, we project to the world, through our actions and our decisions, who we really are and WHOSE we really are.

God has been so generous to us, giving us every good gift. Because we are God's how, then, do we live? Are our actions and attitude praise to God?

How do we treat the most vulnerable members of the community?

Do we listen first and speak only after thoughtful and patient reflection?

Do we look at the bigger picture, or get stuck on the nitty gritty?

Do we "lead with our ears, follow up with our tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear"? Or do we make these big blanket statements that exclude others who disagree with us – and ignore our neighbour's plight?

Can we learn to be ok with the many interpretations of God's love, or have we created a God who only loves the people that we love?

Can we see beyond the exterior of people's clothing and manner and way of life to what is really going on within?

Do we share generously from God's good abundant gifts of love, compassion and courage regardless of whether they are returned to us?

In James 1:26-27 we read, "People who set themselves up as "religious" by talking a good game are self-deceived. This kind of worship is hot air and only hot air. Real worship, the kind that passes muster before God, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

What about the "homeless and loveless" of our own time?

Can we love these whom God loves?

Do you see only faults in the people and places around you or do you make a conscious effort to see beyond?

What does the Lord require of you?

What does the Lord require of you personally?

Are you stuck on the handwashing before eating – like we heard from the Mark scripture, or do you see beyond the surface to the real issues?

Are you stuck on the issues, or do you see beyond the issues to the real heart of the people in the world who are hurting?

In Micah 6:8 we read,

8God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

What does the Lord Require of **You**? Amen