

Faith is a common denominator. Every one alive daily expresses faith in something. No one can live a single day without exercising faith. When you awoke and went into the bathroom this morning you flipped a light switch and you had faith that it would work. When you get in your car you turn the key or push the button and have faith that it will start. When you mail a letter you have faith the postal system will get it to the right address. Someday! Every time you walk into a building you are expressing faith in the architect and the workmen. In each instance there was an action. You flipped a switch, you turned a key, pushed a button, you mailed the letter, you walked into a building.

You people listening to me today, say that you have faith in Jesus. That He lived and died for you. That Jesus is the Way, The Truth and the Life. How do I know what you're telling me with your lips is true? I will see it in the actions of your life. Consider today: "Real Faith Is Not Passive".

The early Christians gathered together many times in house churches. They would pray together, a pastor or overseer would share the Word of God, and then they would all celebrate the Lord's Supper. In our story for today, the churchgoers were about to begin the church service when there was a knock at the door. A Christian brother from another city in Macedonia enters the room. And what a brother this is! This man is obviously somehow very important. The man's fingers are decadent in heavy and expensive gold jewelry. His clothing is not the clothing of the common man, for no expense was spared. Some of the people in the room quickly rush over to him and make sure that he has the best seat in the house to hear the pastor. After all, this man obviously deserves the best they can give him. It seems there is also another visitor at the church today. Another Christian brother has arrived and he couldn't be any more opposite of the first visitor. Not only does this man have no jewelry but his clothing is barely adequate to cover him. He smells. Probably hasn't had a bath in a long time. He stands in their presence but no one acknowledges him until finally one man comes forward to say, "Hey, why don't you go stand over in that far corner during the service or grab a seat by my feet here." And so the poor man sits down by himself next to the dirty and smelly feet of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

We can share James' outrage at this story can't we? How dare Christians discriminate like this? One person is not more important than another just because he or she makes more money, or for any other reason. At Open Bible Lutheran Church anyone can come and worship without fear of discrimination. All are welcome. No one has to sit on the floor. Everyone gets a chair!

But do we have a mindset on what type of a person we would like to see at our church? At Open Bible, that would probably be a retiree who has just recently moved to the Villages, Florida. That was the vision of the founding families, a church for retirees. So how would we react if suddenly several young families came to our church with superactive children? Would we be thrilled to see them? Would we attempt to talk with them after the service? Would we volunteer to teach Sunday School, or take a turn to watch the children in the nursery? Or if someone comes to worship from a broken down trailer in Wildwood, has tattoos up both arms, would we attempt to leave our comfort zone and spend some talking to them after the service? Or would we try to avoid the person.

The way of the world is to be nice to people who can do things for you but to

brush off those who may need something from you. What about that former CEO and his wife that have a Premier Home on the Palmer Course overlooking Lake Sumter landing, that just stopped in for worship? Will we tend to fawn all over that couple, and tell our friends, "Look who is coming to our church!" Get em a coffee and ask them to stay for coffee hour. Boy, if this person joins our congregation, we will knock down that remaining mortgage in no time. Yes, Exploit the rich.

Did you ever think of the damage you would do if you shunned the poor and catered to the rich? The poor could think by our attitude that God does not love them and has proven it by their poverty and in the way Christians treat them. A dark cloud of despair would hang over their heads. More suffering. On the otherhand, if we catered to the rich, They would think that their favored treatment was due to their merit before God as well as man, that God made them rich because He loved them more. Surely, since they are such good and wealthy people, God will give them heaven. What a terrible misunderstanding!

When temptations like showing favoritism creep into our hearts, we need to remember that when we stand before God, we are all equally condemned. In God's eyes there are no favorites. We have all broken the royal law, Love your neighbor as yourself." And it doesn't matter how we have broken this law, because James tells us, "whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in just one point, he is guilty of all."

To break one of God's commands is to break them all, James explains. If I come upon an electric fence, it's foolish of me to think that it will only shock me if I run into it ten times in ten different places. No, that fence will shock the first time I touch it - even if I brush up against it accidently. Likewise it doesn't matter whether I break one of God's commands by accident or smash all of them on purpose. I am a lawbreaker deserving of God's eternal judgment. So don't discriminate! Real Faith shows love and concern for both rich and poor alike. It plays no favorites.

Look at Jesus Christ. He was born to poor parents, born in a barn, spent years of his ministry without a bed of his own, and died without even the clothes he wore to his trial. He suffered damnation by God on the cross so that those rich and poor sinners would never have to know what it was like to be left alone by God. The forgiveness that Jesus won was for all people.

God does delight in showering the poor and the down and out of this world with the riches of faith. It is often the shut-in and the pensioner, not the high-powered CEO, from whom we can learn the most about what it means to express and exercise humble faith in Jesus. Just as poor Lazarus showed a greater interest in the gospel than the rich man did, there is today a rich harvest of souls among the poor. Who better can love them than the Christian Church? Who better can give them respect and feeling of worth and value? Who better can reap and use their talents and treasures they bring than a congregational family of believers?

Now comes a section of Scripture that sometimes may be confusing to some people. We learned in the Bible books of Romans and Ephesians these words, In Romans it says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, apart from the deeds of the law." In Ephesians it says, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." As I stand before God, I am declared not guilty, through faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior. But in the book of James, there seems to be a disagreement with that statement.

Look at our text. In verse 17 it says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

So let's try to understand what is going on here. James gives us an illustration of a brother or sister who is down on their luck. They haven't eaten in a while. Their clothes are tattered and flimsy. They smell, and haven't taken a shower in a while. If someone were to say to them, I hope you stay warm and get something to eat. And then walks away without doing anything to change the situation, we would assume that person was a liar. They didn't really hope that the person would be warm and well fed. If they did they would have done something to help them be warm and well fed. Instead they were just full of empty words.

In the same way, if one of our friends, tells us, they have faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and we don't see any kind deeds, and words coming from their mouths, we would assume as human beings, these were just empty words. So James is talking about justification in the eyes of man. How do I as a Christian know, if someone who says they have faith in Christ, really have it in their hearts? I will see it in their lives. Jesus himself said, So you say you are a Christian. Show me the money! The proof is in the pudding. Show me proof! In Romans and Ephesians, Paul is speaking about justification in the eyes of God. Before God, I am justified, declared not guilty through faith alone in Jesus.

My wife had a couple of years ago two Hibiscus plants in our bird cage. I really loved those plants since they regularly yielded gorgeous flowers. But not too long after we had them, the leaves started turning brown and falling from one of the plants. When my wife closely examined the plant she noticed little aphids were attacking and killing the plant. Fortunately, she sprayed those little bugs, killed them, and her sick hibiscus plants were on the road to recovery. How could she tell, the plant was not healthy? It was the outward leaves that gave the situation away. How can we tell if someone has faith in Jesus Christ? Well, we will see it in their lives. These people will worship their Lord regularly in church. These people will still come to church and worship even if things aren't going exactly how they would like them to go at their church. These faith alive Christians will regularly give generous offerings to the church. They will look to serve in the church in some way. In their conversation with friends, their vocabulary and goals for life will reflect that they are followers of the master. They will stand up for the truth of God's word, and not be afraid to take some flack for their faith. Remember the slogan. We are saved by faith alone in Christ, but faith is never alone. So are you a Christian? A believer in Christ.

What evidence do you show? What proof do you present? If you were convicted by ISIS for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Can your friends clearly see that by your words and actions, you are a Christian? Or are you wearing a lampshade over your faith. Jesus once said, "I am the vine and you are the branches. If a person remains in me, I will remain in him, and he will bear much fruit." Are you a fruit bearing vine?

May people in the Villages who run into us say, "Those members at Open Bible, are the most caring, loving bunch of people I have ever met. They are there to help me out, when times get tough. They don't make me feel guilty when I need help. I want what they have. They don't just talk the talk, they walk the walk. Truly, their actions speak louder than words. Real Faith is Not Passive. Amen.