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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 19, 2021
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-10, Mark 8:27-35

Hymns: 363; 421; 439; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. ²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ...

⁸If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; ⁹but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. ...

¹⁴What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

¹⁷Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Faith and Good Works

This is an important area of Christian teaching. Get it wrong and the gospel can be undermined in the hearts of believers, and one can get it wrong very easily in a number of different ways. Certainty of salvation can be replaced with doubt. A conscience at peace can be replaced with a deeply troubled conscience. Most serious of all, the merits of Christ can be replaced in one’s heart and mind with the merits of one’s own righteousness.

As one reads the epistle of James it is important that one reads the exhortations it contains in the context of the Christian faith. We must always pay attention to context, and this is especially true for a proper understanding of James’ encouragements to live lives rich in good works. It begins with understanding that good works are in fact fruits of faith, fruits which a true and living faith holding to the merits of Christ produce in the Christian’s life. However, we also know that each and every one of us is still encumbered in this life with an old adam, that sinful flesh that is above all else focused on self in many different ways.

May the Holy Spirit lead us in --

**THEME: Reflecting Jesus’ Love for Sinners
in our Christin Lives.**

Our text begins with a few simple words that are so important for us: “*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.*” (v.1) before we consider the last two words, we need to consider the object of our faith. Let us --

I. Consider our Glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

That is where this Sunday is focused. In our gospel lesson we read how Jesus asked the disciples a couple of questions regarding His identity, the second of which was, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter answered and said to Him, “*You are the Christ.*” (Mark 8:29) Jesus went on to explain to the disciples exactly what it meant that He was the Christ. It was quite different from what the disciples were expecting. Jesus explained that as the Christ it was necessary for Him to suffer many things at the hands of His enemies and be killed and rise again. Jesus talked openly of His coming sufferings and death for the sins of the world.

When we talk about living our faith it doesn't begin with the Ten Commandments. It begins with Jesus' love for sinners, and His determination to endure all that was necessary for our salvation. Our Old Testament lesson this morning went into great depth revealing details of Jesus' sufferings and humiliation at the hands of His enemies, as well as the determination Jesus possessed to go forward and secure our salvation.

Think of that expression of His will to save you, “*I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.*” (Isaiah 50:7) That is the foundation of our faith. that is the certainty of our salvation. And that is where the Spirit led us with these words of the Prophet Isaiah: “*Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness And has no light? **Let him trust in the name of the LORD And rely upon his God.***” (Isaiah 50:10) For certainty of salvation and for direction throughout life we are called to obey the voice of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, to trust in the name of the Lord, and to **rely upon God**, not upon self, not upon our works, but upon our God and His Christ!

Jesus has secured our salvation. Jesus has taken away our sins. Jesus has borne the curse of the law in our place. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice that brings us to God and assures us of everlasting life in heaven. All this has been done in the greatness of God's love for us poor, miserable sinners. In spite of our unfaithfulness and our sin, Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. And so, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

This is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, that we are to hold without partiality. James is leading us to move from considering how Jesus looks upon us to how He would have us look upon our fellow man; that is with love, impartial love. Because of the weakness of our human flesh, and the influence of the world in which we live we need to --

II. Be Sensitive to the Sin of Partiality.

It's really just a matter of human nature, isn't it? Two people walk into church, one dressed in nice clothing, we would automatically think "appropriate clothing" because we do know that we ought to put forward our best for the Lord, and another comes into church wearing soiled and smelly clothing. It's human nature, we are going to be more inclined to greet the "respectable looking" person more warmly, make sure they have a good place to sit and have a bulletin. Maybe we nod a greeting to the other person, and when we see that found their own seat, we are satisfied. I mean, it's nothing deliberate, or even conscious. It takes a greater effort to be outgoing to someone wearing old and maybe even dirty clothes than it does a "respectable" person. We don't mean anything by it. After church we might chat a bit with the second poorer person. Everything's good! Is it really?

Why did James write about this weakness of showing partiality? He wrote about it because it happens. It happened then, and it happens now. When it happens, it involves making false judgments about people. Whatever the basis of those judgments might be, maybe they're overweight, or they have tattoos, or they speak with an accent, or they have a different skin tone, whenever we consider one person more worthy than the other, we "*have become judges with evil thoughts.*" (v.4)

James reminds us that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit James clearly calls out such partiality as a failure to love our neighbor as we ought. It is sin! Our flesh will protest, "I didn't do anything!" Oh, but we did! What we did was a violation of the God's law of love. Love is the fulfillment of the law. Whoever messes up even once in loving our neighbor is a lawbreaker.

So what if it was only once! And we all know that we have looked down on other people because of their appearance far more than

once. We all know we have failed to love our neighbor in many more ways, on many more occasions than once! But what if it was only once? Doesn't matter. You are a lawbreaker. An armed robber only has to rob one bank or convenience store to be an armed robber. That act makes him an armed robber. Once convicted of his crime he is a convicted felon. The label is correct and the label sticks. We only have to break a commandment, any commandment, ONCE to be a convicted sinner!

The law shows us our sins. Christ reveals the love of God, a love that is unto salvation. James reminds us: "*Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*" (v.5) Being poor doesn't merit God's grace. Grace means it isn't merited. In His grace the Lord often bestows a greater blessing upon the poor than the rich could ever possess in their riches when He calls the poor in in worldly stuff to know the wonders of heavenly treasures. In fact, the love of money, and the human tendency to trust in temporal wealth can be a spiritual stumbling block getting in the way trusting in the Lord for life and salvation.

God loves the world, and so the poor are loved by the Lord and ought to be loved by us as well. We are called to faith that we might --

III. Let our Faith Emulate Christ to Glorify Christ before the World.

In the closing verse of our text James is drawing a distinction between a living faith and a cold, pseudo faith that is little more than knowing the facts of the Bible. While we need to know the Scriptures, people may confuse a good knowledge of Scripture with genuine faith. Genuine faith produces fruits of faith, acts of love and devotion that are evident to others. James warns against empty talk and encourages acts of love toward our neighbor. That isn't about earning salvation. It isn't even about gaining certainty of salvation. It is about glorifying Christ before the world. The kind deeds we do for others ought to direct people's attention to the One whom we confess to be our Lord and Savior. We show others our faith in Jesus by our acts of love toward our neighbor.

In this world we never lack opportunity to do good. There are so many people hurting in so many ways. If we can't possibly help them all! We may be inclined to focus on our community, and there is good reason to do that. This is where the Lord has placed us in this world, and this is where we confess Christ before the world. The Lord gives us another focus for doing good. *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, **especially to those who are of the household of faith.**"*

(Galatians 6:9-10)

Be assured of this, the Lord creates plenty of opportunities for children of God to do good, in fact He has made us for this very purpose. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10) So doing good to others is part and parcel of being a new creature in Christ Jesus. *"It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:13) God's get's the glory. God gets **all** the glory. It's all part of our Christian witness that we show our faith in God with our works as much as our confession. We recall the words of our Savior in the Sermon on the Mount: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16)

What we learn about faith from all this is that faith is so much more than academic knowledge and being a good student of the Bible. **Faith is building one's hope for life on the merits of Christ.** A living faith then follows Christ, even into suffering and death. A living faith is emulating Christ's love and compassion for sinners. Even though Jesus remained focused on proclaiming the gospel and calling people to repentance and faith, He did not ignore the suffering people endured, but reached out in compassion and helped them.

May we also be God's instruments to proclaim the hope of everlasting life, and also show the love of God in consideration of the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.