



Can Faith Save You?
James 2:1-17
2nd in the sermon series on James
Sunday, September 9th, 2018
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

Text: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? (verse 14)

The writer of James is flabbergasted. You heard the lesson. He seems to be saying, how can you in good conscience give preferential treatment to one person over another? Once comes in with gold rings and fine clothes and you say, "Have a seat here, please. This is one of the best seats in the house!" And another person who is poor is shown to the narthex or the balcony. How can you in good conscience and Christ's name make such distinctions?

Someone once told me that I needed to visit a newcomer in town not because they expressed any interest in the church but because, and I quote, "they are rich". What an odd thing to say to a minister of Word and Sacrament. It made me feel sorry for the rich person. How could she ever be sure that someone liked her, wanted to spend time with her or be her friend? Wouldn't she always wonder if the relationship was built on genuine friendship or was it built on what she could give? I think that this is why many presidents of the United States maintain their closest relationships with those who knew them before they became the most powerful person in the world. They hang on their their grade school and high school and college friends because they knew them "when"; when they weren't burdened by the trappings of this world.

In his book, The Little Prince, Antoine Saint-Exupéry wrote about "grown-ups" and our "grown up bias".

"Grown ups love figures. When you tell them that you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, 'What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?' Instead they demand: 'How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?' Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him.

"If you were to says to the grown-ups: 'I saw a beautiful house made of rosy brick, with geraniums in the windows and doves on the roof,' they would not be able to get any idea of that housed at all. You would have to tell them how much it cost. Then they would exclaim: 'Oh, what a pretty house that is!'"

The late homiletics professor and preacher once told the story of seeing two beautiful sixteen year old girls within the span of a week or two. The first girl wore a beautiful blue dress and was coming down a spiral staircase to the applause of an admiring group of family and friends.

The second girl, a couple of weeks later, was equally pretty. She was standing on the porch of a mountain cabin in Kentucky. She held a young child whose father was long gone. She was standing on the porch alone with a half-dozen scrawny chickens pecking in the yard. She lived in a gray world without much hope.

In his prayers that evening Craddock asked God, "Did you notice the difference? Why is it in this world, does one sixteen-year old walk down a spiral staircase, while another sixteen year old stands on the porch of a poor shack with a baby in her arms? Now, why the difference?"

He began to think that maybe God was getting a little old, slipping a bit, if you know what I mean. But as Craddock thought of this possibility a little voice appeared in his head. It was the still small voice of God. It said, "What difference? I don't see a difference."

The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans that there is no difference between the Greek and Jews for it is the same Lord who is Lord of all. (Romans 10:12)

And in the letter to the Galatians Paul wrote, "In Christ's family there can be no difference between Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal." That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous 'descendant,' heirs according to the covenant promises.

Visible reminders of this invisible and eternal truth sit in our chancel area each time we worship; the baptismal font and behind it the communion table. We are baptized not because who we are but because of Whose we are--God's precious children created in the Divine image. And we dare share the bread and fruit of the vine from the table not because we are worthy but because we are part of God's eternal family, adopted children of the Creator of the ends of the earth.

So, on to the question of day; "Can faith save you?" Jesus once said that you can tell the nature of a tree by the fruit that it produces. We betray what we believe in, we betray our true faith by the decisions we make and lives that we live. When in the name of our so-called "faith" when we draw distinctions between ourselves and others, divide the world into "us" and "them", those who agree with us and those who disagree, those who are rich and those who are poor, those whose skin color is a different shade from ours, or whose languages and customs are not the same as ours, and those who vote differently than we do.

But it is real and alive when despite these surface differences we can see the face of God in the face of the other, for they have been saved by the same amazing grace by which we ourselves are saved by.

To God be the glory. Amen.