

## TUESDAY COMMUNION

**Hymn:** 539. One who is all unfit to count.

**Reading:** James 2.1-9

### Prayers:

Before John Wesley died he lamented the effect that money was having on the church. Many early Methodists were from the poorest sections of society. When they came to faith in Christ and joined those first Methodist societies they were encouraged:

- to learn to read and write
- to work hard at their trade
- to make the most of their opportunities

Many of them became successful businessmen. Sometimes, they became greedy and grasping, failing to pay their workers a fair wage, even employing them in dangerous conditions. Out of their profits, they built some fine chapels, often with their own reserved seats.

Perhaps James was seeing something similar in the churches which he knew.

The Christian Gospel has the power to change women and men.

- It gives them a new sense of their dignity and the possibilities God is putting before them.
- Often, faith gives people an energy which makes them successful in their field of endeavour.

The danger is that those who become successful in the eyes of this world, can expect to be treated differently and actually be treated differently – even within the church!

James speaks about the danger of “favouritism”, of treating people differently according to how they are dressed or the magnificence of their jewellery. He speaks of such people being given the best seats in the Christian assembly though it’s not quite clear whether this at a time of worship or when the church gathers to make its decisions.

- If it’s at a time of worship then it’s about creating a two tier church in which some have the “best” seats and others the “worst”. (In the Nineteenth century the church in England was damaged by the payment of pew rents for seats downstairs whilst the servants and the poor were confined to the gallery!)
- If the gathering is to make decisions about the life of the church and its members then the rich are perhaps being excused failings for which the poor are being condemned!

James asks

***“Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom to those that love him?”***

Here is a belief which has deep roots in the faith of Israel. If God had favoured the rich, would he not have chosen mighty Egypt and Pharaoh over the Israelite slaves and Moses?

For Christians, would not God have chosen someone from the family of the high priest as the Messiah and not a crucified carpenter?

I know in myself, how easily I make judgements about people based on their outward appearances. In America, the smartly dressed, smooth talking, clearly respectable Mr. Maydoff was trusted by thousands of people with their money.

No doubt, some of his investors talked with contempt about those who lived in the poorer parts of their inner cities:

- Wasters, drug addicts, criminals.

Yet it was nice Mr. Maydoff who made off with their money through his extraordinary financial scam. James would have appreciated the irony!

Right at the beginning of our reading, James remind us of the basic question:

***“My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?”***

When we treat some people as of greater worth than others, more worthy of our time and attention, we deny the Lord in whom we claim to have faith for he gave his life for the sake of all, especially the poor.

By contrast, Mother Theresa spoke a true prayer when she asked each day that she might see Christ in the dying wretches for whom she cared with great compassion in Calcutta.

Our belief that Christ is in every person, challenges the way we see and treat both the poor and the rich, ignorant and learned. People are not to be valued for the size of their bank balances. but as God’s daughters and sons.

God has no favourites – and neither must we!