

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 184 With glorious clouds encompassed round

Reading: James 2.14-17

Prayers:

It has always been tempting for religious people to think that it is the quality of our worship and our protestations of faith that matter more than anything else to God. Certainly, Christians are never going to belittle “faith”. Yet, faith can have two different aspects.

I always remember one woman telling me many years ago that she was a “great believer”. I was somewhat taken aback as it wasn’t something I’d particularly seen in the pattern of her life. What I realised later was that she was saying she had a “great belief” in the existence of God.

Other people might doubt his presence in the world but she was confident he existed. Indeed, faith is partly this acceptance of God’s existence and an intellectual assent to the kind of God we believe him to be.

Faith like this is important but it is not what James (or John Wesley for that matter) would have called a “saving faith”. It is the faith of the mind and not of the heart! In other words, it’s **not** the kind of faith which :

- opens our inward ear to what God is saying to us
- makes us trust God in a way that radically changes our lives
- creates in us the self-giving love that is the mark of Christ upon us.

The kind of faith which transforms our lives is one which combines both mind and heart. It is the faith which so unites us with Christ that his spirit shapes the way we think and speak and act. It is the faith which stamps the mark of Christ upon our lives so that we begin to reflect his love in the whole of our lives.

James imagines a situation, which would not have been uncommon in the early church, where a very poor member of the church lacks clothing and food.

Anyone in that church (not just those who are wealthy) but James insists, “anyone” who ignores their need and just wishes them a good day and hopes they’ll find help has the kind of faith that is dead because it lacks “works”.

True faith, James says, is revealed by the faith that shows itself in acts of compassion, that gives of itself no matter what the cost.

In this Holy Week we watch Jesus, the man who above all others is the man of faith, as he lives out those final days of his life.

We know him as a man who not only believes that God exists but who trusts that

God is like a good mother or father, someone whose love for us is eternal and does not fail.

Yet that faith is tested as Jesus goes about the work he believes God has given to do.

We see Jesus at work

- as he causes a minor riot in the Temple
- as he responds to questions and teaches us to render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God's.
- as he accepts the gift of love from a woman who breaks into the room where he is eating and who with tears of gratitude anoints Jesus' head
- as he shares in a Last Supper with his friends and takes the towel and the basin and washes their feet
- as he prays in an agony of spirit in Gethsemane and goes to the cross saying, "Father, forgive them."

Jesus was a mind and heart man in whom the intellect and the emotions were united in a profound trust in God, tested though it was in the terrible tension of those final hours. In him faith and works were united in perfect harmony!

Perhaps the events of this Holy Week will lead us to repentance for the times when words and deeds have been terribly separated in our lives, when what we said and how we have lived have been many miles apart.

May Christ crucified

- bring us the assurance of our forgiveness,
- may our faith, our understanding of God, be deepened,
- and may we show our trust in God through the lives we live.

Amen.