

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 175 O Love divine, what has thou done (grace!)

Reading: James 2.8-13

Prayers:

There are few more important issues for the Christian than the relationship between “law” and grace.

Grace is God’s acceptance of us as his daughters and sons not because we are morally perfect but because :

- he chooses to be our friend,
- to reach out in love,
- to draw us to himself.

Both the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament bear witness to this God of grace. God reaches out Abram and chooses to act for the sake of the whole world through this man and his family. Yet, Abram and his family prove to be a very imperfect people.

The New Testament bears witness to the way Jesus reached out to women and men in all their different need. One of the great accusations about this man was he met with sinners and ate with them. He chose to be with them because they were people who mattered to God, people God wanted to have life and to have it in all its fullness.

In this Passiontide we recall that it was for the sake of humanity that Jesus accepted the way that led to the cross.

As we heard Jesus say in our Gospel reading on Sunday, “And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.”

But if God is a God of grace does that mean that we don’t have to be concerned about the way we live. James assumes that the law expresses the wisdom of God and is a God given guide as to how we should live. He’s not advocating that we keep the Hebrew Law which deals with the ritual of religion as his letter shows no interest in that at all.

He is concerned about the basic laws that govern our human behaviour as they are interpreted by Jesus.

James takes us back to the Ten Commandments as he writes about the laws regarding murder and adultery. These may not be laws that either we or his readers have broken!

Yet, in his letter James constantly links the Ten Commandments with those two rules of life which we find in the same passage, which were central to Jesus' understanding of how we should live

“You shall love the Lord your God”
and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

We may not have committed murder but who among us has loved God and loved our neighbour with our whole being?

In the end, we are all dependant on the mercy of God. We have all failed God and failed our neighbours. Behind what James says about mercy is his belief that mercy belongs to God. What ought to happen is that as we recognise that in his grace, his outgoing love, God is merciful to us then we ought to show mercy to others.

William Barclay writes of mercy:

***“The one who has practiced it in his life will become more and more like God;
and he who has made no attempt to practice it will become ever more distant from God.”***

The danger is that, if we show no mercy, then we cut off ourselves from the heart of God.

James seems to quote another authority in verse 13:

“Mercy triumphs over judgement!”

Many having wonder whether James is quoting a saying of Jesus that we don't have in the Gospels. It certainly has about it that feeling of a pithy saying of Jesus as he declares:

- God's mercy is greater than our human failings
- and**
- when we show mercy to others we open ourselves to the mercy of God.

All of which reminds us powerfully that we must ask the God of grace to teach us to be merciful in our thinking, words and actions as he, himself, has been merciful to us.

Amen.