

## TUESDAY COMMUNION

**Hymn:** 171 My God, I love thee – not because

**Reading:** James 4.1-4, 7-8

### Prayers:

James makes a very direct challenge to his readers and to us:

***“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”***

It raises the question as to what it means to live as a friend of God rather than a friend of the world.

James makes a startling accusation. He talks about a church in which there are such conflicts, such a longing to have what they do not possess that they even commit murder!

What was the situation he was addressing? The truth is that we don't know for sure but we can make one or two guesses.....

Friendship with the world isn't only a matter of wanting unlimited wealth and sexual freedom and obtaining it through the exploitation of others. It's about wanting a way of life which is centred on what we want for ourselves rather than what God wants of us.

Such a way of life can be dressed in very pious clothing!

Envy and jealousy between two rival flower arrangers (thankfully not a problem in our church) can lead them to accuse each other of this and that, the attempt to “murder” each other's reputation.

James speaks about the attitude of rich and powerful Christians towards those who are poor and weak in the church.

It has been one of the besetting sins of the church that those who exercise authority within it have often done so at the expense of the weak.

- They have not listened to them.
- They have belittled their faith.
- They have not allowed them to contribute fully in the life of the church.
- They have made them feel unwanted.

In the end, they have destroyed the faith of the weak, in a sense “murdering” the spirit within their poorer and weaker brothers and sisters.

(Sadly, I know of those who have left the Methodist Church and given up on the Christian faith because of the way they have been treated!)

But it may be that James was literally thinking of murder.

The period in the years after the crucifixion of Jesus were a time of increasing Jewish revolt against the Romans. There were those groups who believed it was right to murder Roman officials or those who acted in their name.

Zacchaeus, the Roman tax collector, though a Jew himself would have been a suitable target.

There may have been Jewish Christians who had allowed their Jewish nationalism to lead them to a course of action which ended in murder.

James would appear to believe it to be wrong to take life even if the cause appears to be good or right.

It is sometimes easy within the church to speak of the worldliness of people who are outside it, to criticise their attitudes to sex and money.

We can not to ignore these temptations since we, too, can be tempted in a similar way.

Yet, within the life of the church there can be a worldliness even at the heart of our life together. It can come from our own deep emotions, a bitterness or anger or envy which gives rise to a threatening or dismissive attitude, a use of the tongue, which can “murder” those around us.

James warns us that this friendship with the world sets us against the God we meet in Jesus. So, we examine ourselves lest, without realising it, we have lost our friendship with God and have made friends with the destructive powers

- that make us want to dominate and control,
- to build up ourselves rather than give praise and glory to God.

Amen.