

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 72 In all my vast concerns with thee

Reading: James 5. 13-16

Prayers:

In every life there is light and shade.

The same was true of the lives of those Christians to whom James writes his letter.

- Some of the church members had plenty with which to put up!

No wonder some of them felt low!

It was, after all, a church where the rich and powerful sometimes made life hell for those who were poorer. They ignored them, speaking harsh and unloving words enjoying their affluence without thought for others and not even sharing their food with them.

They must have wondered what on earth was this Christian life all about if it wasn't about acting in love towards those in need.....

James says that when people find that the world is harsh and people turn their backs on them, they ought turn to the God who never turns away from us.....

He's saying, "Don't give up just because some people prove to be hypocrites by failing to put faith into action. Stay close to the God whose words and deeds can always be trusted.

- At the same time, some members of the church were finding life good.

There are times when everything seems to be going well: work, friendships, our Christian life.

Then, says, James remember who it is who is the source of all that is good and all that brings you joy, who brings you pleasure and delight.

As we were reminded by Bob Davies at Dot Saintey's funeral, "joy" ought to be the product of the Christian life.

The important thing in such times is not to forget the one who is its source.

James suggests that those who know a deep joy sing songs of praise to God.

Some of us are confined to doing that in our bathrooms whilst it's a pleasure to listen to others!

- James says that if anyone is sick the sick person should invite the "elders" to come to the house and to pray with them. It's interesting that it's the sick person that makes the invitation. It's not to be a matter of the church pushing in where it's not wanted but of people coming by invitation.

Prayer, and elsewhere James underlines the importance of praying with sincerity, is what we would expect the church to offer.

“Anointing” may seem strange to us though in many Christian traditions it is still an accepted part of their liturgies of baptism and healing.

In James’ generation, anointing was a medical practice when people were sick. Here, though, it seems to have a religious significance for it is done, as James puts it, “in the name of the Lord”.

In the Hebrew Scriptures oil is a symbol of the goodness and blessing of God, and is linked with plenty and wellbeing. The anointing oil isn’t a magic potion but a sign that a person is held in the goodness and kindness of God.

James appears to be saying that when such prayer is offered the sick person will immediately recover. We know from our own experience, just as St. Paul did, that that is not always the case.

Physical healing isn’t always granted to the sick. Yet the word for healing is also the word which can be translated as “save”.

For a person to be saved in a religious sense is for them to be brought into the presence of God from wherever they have lived outside the close bond of God’s love.

What we can say about prayer which is offered with sincerity and which awakens faith is that it always results in a person being welcomed into the presence of God.

That is where our ultimate salvation, healing and wholeness, lies!
As Paul puts it: “If we live we live unto the Lord and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.”

Physical healing may not always be given us. Whenever we turn to God in love and penitence we encounter the God who welcomes us and draws us to himself. In that sense, all who turn to God are healed; all are made whole, even us!

Amen.