

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn:

Reading: James 5. 19-20, Matthew 18. 15-17

Prayers:

This really is the end of James' letter. He begins his final words in a typically affectionate way, "My brothers and sisters.....".

His letter has made us realise how imperfect was the early church of which he was a part. Human sinfulness:

- backbiting
- indifference to human need
- greed
- lack of love and kindness

were all to be found within the church family. Yet James never despairs of them. They remain to the end his "brothers and sisters".

His letter is clearly intended to have an effect on those who have "wandered from the truth". What James reminds us is that "wandering from the truth" isn't always about no longer believing what is fundamental to the Christian faith.

A person can go on speaking of Jesus as "Lord" and believing in an orthodox way whilst at the same time wandering from the truth by the way they live their lives. This has been James' great concern.

In Matthew's Gospel we listened to words which reveal how the early church recognised the importance of being able to help those who "wandered from the truth" to return to a faithful way of life.....

James has a similar concern and speaks of the importance of saving a person from the spiritual death. This spiritual death is a consequence of no longer live a life which takes seriously what God wants of them.....

There are at least two great challenges to us here.

First, to examine ourselves and to recognise wherein what we believe and how we live may not be at one!

James reminds us that those who preach and teach and, indeed, those who come to communion on a Tuesday morning have a special duty to examine their own lives. My guess is that all of us recognise there is a gulf between the high ideals of love which Jesus places before us and the quality of our own Christian lives.

It's for this reason; we don't confess our sins at the beginning of each service as a matter of routine. It is a recognition that we are sinners; we have failed God and failed those we were called to love.

We are saved not because we are perfect women and men but because the God of grace forgives us and draws sinners to himself. Yet, this relationship still requires that we seek to know and do the will of God.

Ultimately, we can choose to turn our backs on God and wander off on our own!
So, the first challenge is to recognise the truth about ourselves!

The second challenge is one that only a church which is honest about itself, can begin to undertake.

It is the challenge to help others to recognise the truth about themselves and to bring them back into fellowship with God.

I watched “Who do you think you are” a few weeks ago and the comedian, David Mitchell, discovered that his great grandfather had been a Church of Scotland minister. He also discovered the records of the Kirk Sessions which detailed how this man had an almost voyeuristic delight in finding out details of the sexual lives of his parishioners.

No doubt he saw it as a way of reproofing wickedness. We might see it as interfering in the private lives of others.

Throughout Church History there is this sad truth: the church has been more concerned with the morals of the poor than it has been with the morals of the rich.

The poor have been condemned, often for their sexual sins, whilst the rich have been quietly allowed to get away with the sins of greed and indifference to human suffering.

It is worth remembering, and I suspect this is a challenge to us, that the New Testament has far more to say about the temptations which come with wealth than about other human failings.

So the question remains, how do we help each other to recognise the truth about ourselves in a way that is not ignorant, self-righteous or hypocritical!

Indeed, how do we recognise how the affluent nations, of which we are a part, should behave in this world.

How do we avoid the spiritual death of loving our affluence more than we love the God who is the giver of every good gift?

Amen.