

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 548 Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart

Reading: James 1.19-27

Prayers:

One of the qualities which I dislike in myself is the tendency to speak before I think. If someone says something I often am responding before I've really heard what they have to say.

Sometimes, I want to argue another point of view. Sometimes I want to tell a story of my own. Either way, the truth is that I haven't given the person who has spoken my full and undivided attention.....

One of the games I've sometimes tried in a small group is having a nicely polished stone on the table around which we are sitting. We introduce a subject and then people can only speak when they are holding the stone.

Whilst they are holding the stone, no one can interrupt them. When they have finished no one can speak until they are holding the stone. Then they can not criticise what has been said but only put their own point of view.

It is extraordinary how much more carefully people listen to what is actually being said.....

James is especially concerned with the way in which we listen to what he calls "the word of truth".

At the time James is writing the four Gospels had probably not been written or would not have been known. We know that the stories about Jesus were circulating and that some of the sayings of Jesus had been written down. These would have been part of the "word of truth".

James was also a Jewish Christian who greatly valued the Hebrew Scriptures and would have regarded these as a "Word of Truth" as well.

Probably the third source of "truth" was the preaching of the church. The preacher would reflect on the Hebrew Scriptures, the sayings and stories of Jesus, in the light of the needs of the church and the community.

No doubt

- sometimes the preaching would be about the right way to live as a Christian,
- sometimes it would explore what Christian belief involved,
- sometimes it would be a challenge to repentance and renewal.

What James realised, and what has been true through the generations, is that one can listen and let the words go through one ear and out of the other. It is a way of listening which is not listening because we don't allow what is being said to make any difference to us.

We are comfortable as we are. We don't want to change and don't intend to change.

James says that such people are like the person who looks at their face in the mirror and then forgets what they look like. Caroline often invites me to remember what I saw when I looked in the mirror, especially at times when I badly need a haircut!

I forget, too easily, the unkempt sight others have to look at!

Those who listen but do not let the words they hear have any effect on their lives are those who are only hearers and not doers. For them, the "word of truth" is never God speaking. They are never challenged or encouraged or urged into action.

In our Lent prayers of confession we declare that "we have resisted your word in our hearts".

James, from his standpoint, urges us, "Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

Listening is important but listening without any response is not what the Christian life is all about!