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My brothers and sisters, do not show favouritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:1,12-13 CSB)

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What does it mean to 'love someone'? This week children from Grace Lutheran Creche and Kindergarten have joined together with us worship and reflected on the theme of 'Showing God's Love in the World'. Most beautifully (in a 'God-way') the assigned lectionary Readings for this Sunday deal very practically with this question of 'Showing God's love in the world' (FIRST READING: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9,22-23 Justice and generosity better than riches; PSALM: Psalm 125: Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts; SECOND READING: James 2:1-17 Faith shown in love; GOSPEL: Mark 7:24-37 A woman's faith; Jesus heals a deaf mute). Each of these Readings raises a question of how we practically demonstrate the sort of love God wants in our world today.

When it comes to this topic of 'love' we may have all sorts of different viewpoints and understandings. Some may look at that sense of 'romantic' love between a couple. Others may think of familial love within a family. Others may think of our ethical basis for the way we treat other people in the world (for example, in the workplace). Others may point to acts of charity. And still others will speak of the deep and practical connections people may have with one another (ie: what it mean to truly be a 'good friend'). What does it mean to love? What does it mean to 'show God's love in the world'?

The Book of James within the Bible is often described as something like 'The Wisdom Literature of the New Testament'. In other words, it is a collection of thoughts in terms of *how* we live our lives in the world on the basis of our knowledge of God's great grace and love for us in Christ Jesus.

The author of James is most likely the brother of Jesus (and not the Apostle James). James, is one of several brothers of Jesus (Matt.13:55). James, like Jesus' other siblings, was not supportive of Jesus during His early ministry. The apostle John makes the point that even his own brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). However, that was to change.

Among those disciples who were found with the apostles in Jerusalem following Jesus' ascension were His brothers (which included James: Acts 1:14, cf. 1 Cor.15:7). And James was put to death for his faith in Jesus around AD 62 (or AD 69): James was a leader of the church in Jerusalem (and also the first church synod in Jerusalem: Acts 15). Paul called James a 'pillar of the church' (Gal.2:9). Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Gal.1:19). When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Acts 12:17).

James was a leading figure in the church at Jerusalem. And what was James concern? James, who had a long journey of faith (from 'unbelief', we may say, to 'great belief') was concerned that the faith of those who claimed to 'know Jesus' was also to have an effect in a person's life. James said, 'So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.' (James 2:17)

Martin Luther, at one time, called James an 'epistle of straw' as (at the time of the Reformation) he said it argued for a 'salvation by works'. What is true is that in the letter of James (addressed probably to Christians of Jewish origin around Jerusalem)... the book of James does not have 'the gospel' in a 'descriptive' sense. The book of James does not talk about Jesus Christ. The book of James does not talk about the atonement and Jesus' death on the cross. The book of James does not talk about grace. But this is not to say 'grace' is not 'present' in his letter. James is concerned about what some might call an 'authentic faith', and James concern for an 'authentic faith' really was a 'gospel call'.

Here there, then, there are two question that are good to consider: what is grace? And, how will shall 'grace' 'affect' (impact, influence, shape, overflow, etc) in a person's life?

One: what is grace? James gives us a very simple description (James 2:1-4): *My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?*

How can we also understand this? This is what Isaiah says (sa.64:6): "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

James meant that, literally at the time, people made distinctions in a congregation about the clothes poorer people would wear to worship. But James called people to treat others with 'grace', that is, 'acceptance'. People do things wrong. They may even 'dress well' on the outside, but 'inside' the heart feels 'dirty' (unclean). God accepts all people. Jesus does not show favouritism.

And so, James calls for a 'living faith'; a faith that 'loves' but also that does not ignore God's call to a holy way of life. Thus, James says (2:10): "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." This, of course, is a 'hard word' (and it's meant to be a 'hard word'). Just one 'little thing wrong' and you're as bad as any you might describe as 'the worst of sinners'. But here James wants to draw you to the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. James says (2:12-13): "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment." Mercy triumphs over judgment.

What does all this mean for us? The answer includes this: (1) the way you live your life here on earth really matters. Take, for example, every week worship. God commands His people to gather in worship (Heb.10:25; Deut.5:12-15, etc). There is a call in both the Old and New Testaments for God's people to assemble together in worship. Thus, to stay away (unless illness or work makes one unable) is a sin. However, 'mercy triumphs over judgement' (James.2:13b). We are not to 'judge others'; rather, your concern is a for a fellow Christian's spiritual well-being. James also 'pushes this further'. He speaks about congregations actively involved in works of love toward fellow Christians. James says (1:14-16), "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister (*ie: fellow Christian*) is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

What else does James want for us? The answer includes 'mercy triumphs over judgment'. As you read through James, remember also the Gospel for this day (Mark 7:24-37). A woman came to Jesus and at first it seemed Jesus did not want to hear her. The reality was that Jesus wanted the people's ears to be 'open' to the true message of Christ: the One who would suffer and die an account of your sins (and mine), and the sins of the whole world.

James knew 'the gospel of Jesus'. After all, he was the brother of Jesus and had seen the cross and the resurrected Lord. He knew about forgiveness because he had failed Jesus and yet been restored. And just like Paul called for 'holy living', James calls for 'holy living'. But these things you are called to do are done not to make other people happy, or to have a 'good feeling for yourself' (as though somehow you think you have done a 'good thing'). Rather, we simply say 'thank you Jesus for loving me so well'.

"Faith without works is dead". The 'great work' is to 'keep faith' in Jesus: this is the 'work' of the Holy Spirit. God has showered His great love upon you through Jesus (His eternal Son, and our Saviour-God). As you rejoice in the knowledge of God's love in your life, may you also rejoice in every opportunity to serve, to be 'God's light in a dark world', and, to 'love and serve one another'. Peace be to you. Amen.