

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

Welcome!

From the Ministry Team  
Rev Rod Peppiatt & Pastor Jo McKenzie-Crisp

Whoever you are, however you think of yourself, wherever the path of life and spirit has led you, whatever the truths you hold – or don't, the Holy Spirit, and this church, welcomes you in this moment.



## A Prayer for 10.15 am Sunday morning.

(Some of us will be online, some not, but we will all be in our homes. We invite you to pause for a while at 10.15am, maybe light a candle if you have one handy, and take time together in spirit.

Say the blessing below with other people in your mind, and “hear” yourself blessed by them.

Pray the prayer, apart but together, and then perhaps spend time with the wisdom of James in the letter to early Christians...)

*“May the grace of our lord Jesus Christ, the love of GOD, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”. (2 Corinthians 13:14)*



There is a beauty, Holy ONE, in being together as a people of GOD, a beauty called “*communion*”. In communion we draw together to remember who we are, to become present to your life in the world, and to be renewed in our calling to follow your way. We raise our eyes above the everyday. We open our ears, hearts, hands, and imagination to sacredness - in our midst and beyond us.

Today we are physically distanced from one another because of the pandemic, and pray that we, our loved ones, and our world, may be held in “*the communion of the Holy Spirit*”.

Amen.

## ATTENDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

James 1:17-27

How, then, shall we live?

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

*You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.*

*But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act -they will be blessed in their doing.*

*If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*



For thousands of years, Indigenous people have walked in this land, on their own country. Their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives. We honour the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and their Elders; past, present, and emerging, stewards of this land throughout the ages. We offer ourselves afresh to the story of truth and reconciliation in this land, in the name of Christ.

## Wisdom, and the letter of James

Have you read the letter of James lately? (or ever?) It's been a while for me (Rod), I led a study series on this letter years ago, and learned heaps at the time. It's a really good read!

"James" occupies an interesting place among the letters of the New Testament. It has often been contrasted over the centuries with the Pauline letters - both those written by Paul and those written later in his name - on the perceived conflict between "faith/salvation by grace" and "grace/salvation by works". James' assertion that "*Faith without works is dead*" has been placed in opposition to Paul's insistence that salvation is through GOD's grace alone, most notably by Martin Luther (1483-1546) who famously described James as a "*letter of straw*", with "*nothing in it of an evangelistic nature*".

More recently, however, the consensus is that drawing such a rigid distinction between the traditions of Paul and James does a disservice to both. Paul clearly understood and argued that faith called for a response is how followers of Jesus lived, and how they acted within the world. Likewise, James affirmed that good works were a response to grace, not a means of earning it. For both of them, faith came first, and was in itself a response to grace, which then empowered and called for a lifestyle that matched the words.

Recognising all of that, it's still true that James is a different type of letter from many/most of the others in the New Testament. In some ways, it sits more closely with the 'wisdom' literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and many of the Psalms), than with the other New Testament letters. I use "wisdom" here, not in the sense of how to get smarter or more knowledgeable, but in the sense of how to live. The writer no doubt raised eyebrows in the late first century among the early churches, and the 'conventional wisdom' of their day. Perhaps we should check where our eyebrows are when we read the following:

- *The wisdom of James cautions against the seduction and abuse of wealth (2:1-7).*
- *The wisdom of James urges against the vicious cycle of consumerism (4:1-2).*
- *The wisdom of James lifts up the value and practices of the faith community (5:13-16).*
- *Above all else, the wisdom of James understands faith is expressed in conduct (2:14-26).*

(Seasons of the Spirit, 2020)

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My thoughts above are really to give a context to the Letter of James as a whole, rather than to the particular passage. I encourage us all to spend some time with the letter over the next weeks, noting what we see, what surprises us, what affirms or confronts, what encourages etc.

One of my favourite questions in any form of reading and/or study is "*What jumps out at you?*" It's a favourite because it invites us into conversation with what we're reading, without the fear of being wrong! I'll be creating opportunities wherever possible for us to talk about what we notice, and perhaps share our responses with each other. (Oh look, a lockdown project!)

Blessings, *Rod*

*Please hold the light of love and prayer for the world,  
for each other, and for ourselves.*

