



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 29 AUGUST 2021 – 13th Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 45: 1-2, 6-9

- 1 My heart is astir with gracious words; ♦
as I make my song for the king,
my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.
- 2 You are the fairest of men; ♦
full of grace are your lips,
for God has blest you for ever.
- 6 Your throne is God's throne, for ever; ♦
the sceptre of your kingdom is the sceptre of righteousness.
- 7 You love righteousness and hate iniquity; ♦
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness above your fellows.
- 8 All your garments are fragrant with myrrh, aloes and cassia; ♦
from ivory palaces the music of strings makes you glad.
- 9 Kings' daughters are among your honourable women; ♦
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

James 1: 17-27

¹⁷ 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.^[a] ¹⁸ 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.

Hearing and Doing the Word

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved:^[b] let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ 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.

²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves^[c] in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ 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.

Mark 7: 1-8, 14, 15, 21-23

7 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands,^[a] thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it;^[b] and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.^[c]) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live^[d] according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' ⁶ He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

"This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines."

⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

Reflection from Hannah...

Our Epistle this week is that of James. James was the brother of Jesus and, it's thought, the leader of the Jerusalem Council. So whereas Paul's letters are written from far-flung places, to far-flung places; James has remained in Jerusalem and is writing to those members of the Jewish Community who are followers of Christ, and scattered around the known world.

James is extremely practical- his letter, encouraging those who are building lives in new places, focuses on the need to live out faith, not just speak it out. His emphasis is not on complex theological debate, but more on the consequences for how we behave, with the resurrection of Jesus as a given. It's every-day, prosaic advice. In verse 19 he encourages us to be 'quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger'. In verse 22 he says 'but be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves'. Verse 27- 'care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.'

These are not hard words to understand! They are plain and plainly written- the hard thing is actually living them out. This is advice born out of the experiences of a settled church- the mother church in Jerusalem- whose members lived whole lives in that one place, under the eyes of the Roman guard, non-believing onlookers, and each other. James' point is that once words are spoken, belief affirmed, an identity created, people will then look for consistency and integrity in behaviour- do we practice what we

preach? That is the stuff of mission; lives that sing God's story, lives that others pay attention to.

There are profound similarities with our situation today here in Severn Loop. Our communities are largely settled, and the church is present and known. It is in the living out of our faith- when we listen well, are slow to anger, look after those on the margins, respond in our lives to what we believe- that we honour Jesus and communicate something of the life that he brings, in a world that seeks to deaden.

And in doing so, we become, as James puts it 'the first fruits of all God created.' We're coming to harvest time soon (the farmers amongst us are already in the thick of it!); those first fruits are a sign of the abundance that is to come. God is utterly faithful, and provides all that we need. As verse 17 says '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.' We live as first fruits, but we do none of this in our strength alone- all that is good comes from God. It is in response to, and out of, God's lavish, extravagant, grace-filled love that we live. It is not us working to make God love us (that could never be), but it is God who enables us to step into that identity of being a first fruit- a foretaste of what is to come, to live, for the long haul, lives that walk the talk, pointing to Christ.