

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Bible Readings: James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-23

Date: 30 August 2015

Hope you have had a great summer.

Three part holiday this year ... after all the prep for Zoe's wedding last summer. We can't believe it's their anniversary this weekend, their anniversary is today and they have headed off to Italy!

Wonderful time in Scotland and the Lakes.

Amazing scenery and fantastic walks.

Mixed weather but never so bad that we couldn't get out.

The third part was a family long weekend at home – which was just great and on the Sunday just the five of us: an occasion which we figure will become much more of a rarity as time goes on.

In the Summer Sundays we have been following Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus .. we come now to three weeks looking at the first part of the letter of James.

Some questions about who James was ... seems that he was one of JC's closest friends. Along with Peter and John he is privileged to be with Jesus at the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9) and privileged to share intimate moments of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14).

Right from the beginning, he writes in an upbeat style.

He encourages:

- those who suffer to consider it joy,
- those who feel they lack wisdom to ask God and he will give it,
- those who are lowly to boast in being raised up,
- those who face temptation to know God's blessing in enduring

James is my kind of a guy – he's a glass half full kind of person.

Now here in the second half of chapter 1 we find him offering three keys pieces of advice or wisdom ...

vv17-18 God is good and we are amazing

- a. the Father of lights*
- b. we would become a kind of firstfruits*

vv19-21 and 26 There is a battle going on inside us

- a. rid yourselves of ...*
- b. welcome with meekness*

vv22-25 and 27 Just do it!

be doers of the word not merely hearers

vv17-18 God is good and we are amazing

- a. the Father of lights*
- b. we would become a kind of firstfruits*

This phrase, the “Father of lights” is very evocative. It reminds us of the early words of Genesis where God says “let there be light”. It reminds us of Jesus words that we are to call God “our heavenly Father”.

James is underlining in a shorthanded kind of way that God gives us everything we need, everything we can see and know. And it’s all good. He calls it a perfect gift from above.

Holidays are a good time to reflect on this giving of God – amazing scenery, beautiful landscapes, sunshine and blue skies. But now just in holidays can we appreciate all this. Also in architecture and construction (the metropolitan skyline), in artistic endeavour (the galleries in London) and in musical skill (Glyndebourne, The Proms, the Reading Festival), everything creative and good points us to our wonderful creator God, the Father of lights. God is good.

God is good ... and we are amazing ...

And it’s not just those external “things” it’s also us.

He gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would become a kind of firstfruits ...

We (but not just we here today, all people everywhere) we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are different from the other creatures (amazing though they are). We are made to be in relationship with our creator. He gives us life and sustains it in us.

He has a part to play in every new birth and gives some of us the privilege of sharing in that creative work.

We are all made to have the capacity to relate to him, to turn to him, to be grateful to him for his love for his mercy and for his grace. We are special. Because he makes us so, the first fruits of his creatures.

We are designed to reflect in the way to one another, God’s character, his beauty, his majesty, his grace.

One of the challenges of this perspective is that the enemy (about whom we were hearing last week with Dolapo from Ephesians 6) the enemy has a strategy and a plan to undermine this, to undercut this, to dismantle this whenever and wherever he can.

This leads us to part 2:

vv19-21 and 26 There is a battle going on inside us

- a. rid yourselves of ...
- b. welcome with meekness

Living out the Christian faith is not straightforward. We have a tension within which can cause us pain and discomfort, which can spill out and spill over and lead us into all kinds of trouble.

And in managing this tension there is a conscious movement at play- ridding and welcoming.

We are to rid ourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness ...

The words that come into our minds, the thoughts we have about other people who really annoy us or drive us round the twist, or frustrate and irritate us beyond belief ... how

we react and respond when we are under pressure we have to work at not allowing this stuff to build up. We might at times be in danger of exploding.

This takes effort. It does not always come naturally. It may be costly. It may feel like a sacrifice. It's all part of becoming more like Jesus, becoming holy as he is holy, taking on the character and the life of God himself, the Father of lights who gives us birth by the word of truth.

So there's a ridding but there's also a welcoming.

We are also to welcome with meekness the implanted word ...

Bill Hybels talks about the whisper of the Spirit. The apostle Paul talks about knowing what he ought to do and struggling to do it. When children are small they really struggle to get the word "sorry" out of their mouths. Adults, especially men, may find it an impossible word to say to their wife, or to colleagues or to friends. So often we know what we ought to say, we just find it hard to speak the word in the right way.

There is a battle going on inside us. The journey to holiness is not an easy one to travel.

Ridding and welcoming ... and finally

v22-25 and 27 Just do it!

be doers of the word not merely hearers

There is something about action which just does speak louder than words.

We'd love to have you over for dinner – really only lands when the invitation comes and the meal is shared and enjoyed.

We are a church which cares for people – really only lands when there's visiting going for those who are unwell and meals made and delivered to those who need a hand for a while.

We are totally committed to our community – really only lands when we serve our community by providing a community hub, conspicuously helping at the carnival, putting on events, groups and activity for the young and the elderly which will enrich life and bring joy.

I may have told you before of my dislike of those kinds of notice boards outside churches which say things like:

- Carpenter welcomes Joiners
- Tomorrow's forecast: God reigns and the Son shines!
- Need a lifeguard? Ours walks on water!
- God expects spiritual fruit, not religious nuts!
- The 10 Commandments are not multiple choice!
- 2 Great Truths: 1) There is a God... 2) You're not Him!

I am not so keen on these kinds of things ... but for today let's just live with these three simple thoughts and take them away:

- God is good and we are amazing
- There is a battle going on inside us: get rid & welcome
- Be doers of the word not merely hearers: just do it!

We are going to have a chance in a few minutes to put some of this into practice:

- a. The Letter to add to the magazine bags
- b. The Bunting for the Carnival
- c. The Invitations for ourselves and for a friend

Let's pray ...