

Title: Faith Producing Works

Text: James 2:14-26

We are continuing to look at what it means to actually live out a life of following Jesus as disciples.

And we have invited Jesus' own brother, James, to be our guide this summer as we do this.

Three weeks ago James taught us that God uses trials and difficulties in our lives to help us grow up and mature.

Two weeks ago James taught us to learn to be quick to listen, and slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

Last week his exhortation was to not show favoritism or judge people by their outward appearance,  
-but to love others as ourselves no matter who they are.

Today, James turns his attention to the place of "good works" in the life of disciples.

-We will be reading James 2:14-26.

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"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds?"

This simple question is actually at the heart of everything James teaches in the whole letter.

-James is concerned that disciples of Jesus learn to "walk the walk" of faith, and not just "talk the talk" of faith.

-That's what the whole letter is about.

James wants those who come to faith in Christ to actually mature in the faith and as he says, "receive the crown of life God has for those who love Him."

-He wants those who are born again into the family of God to actually grow up from infancy to childhood,

-and through adolescence to adulthood and become complete and mature.

And it's in our lives, James says, and in the way we treat other people that the "rubber meets the road."

"Suppose," James writes here, "that a brother or sister in your church is going through hard times at the moment.

-They have had their job shut down because of the Covid-19 quarantine.

-They're special unemployment compensations has just

stopped at the end of July.  
-They are now worried about how they will pay the rent this month, as well as pay for groceries.

James asks, "Are you just going to say, 'Good luck, brother. Go in peace, and I sure hope you get along ok?'  
-Or are you actually going to help them out in some way?"

You see how practical James is about this discipleship stuff?  
"Don't just talk faith talk," he says, "Live it out! Do something with it."

James would have loved the Malden Neighbors Helping Neighbors organization that has sprung up during this Covid pandemic.

-They are doing exactly what James calls for here.  
-Bringing groceries to people in need.  
-And helping out in all kinds of other practical ways.

If you'd like to put your faith into action in the week to come.  
-Call Martha Bezzat from our church, who is helping to coordinate those in need with volunteers who can help, and see what kind of help you might be able to offer.

Jesus is the one who said, "If you love me you will obey my commandments. And this is my command, love one another."

His brother James simply says, "Loving one another means actually taking care of one another.

And that is James whole point in this section of the letter.

-I know that some people get uptight when they read this section of James,  
-because on the surface it seems like James is contradicting the concept that we are saved by grace alone through faith, and not by our good works.

I mean, James does say here in verse 24, "You see, a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

But there is no real contradiction here.

-The Apostle Paul and Jesus himself were just as adamant about a true faith being accompanied by a life of good works as James is.

And as we have said, James is not addressing non-believers here in his letter, but believers.

- And he is not talking here about the way to be saved from sin.
- He is talking to Christians who have already been saved from sin,
  - and is exhorting them to live now as transformed people.

So James is not arguing for good works instead of faith.  
-And if you read the Apostle Paul, you'll see he is not arguing for faith instead of good works.

Both of them urge Christians to a faith that produces good works.

And both James and Paul point to Abraham as an example of how faith and good works actually function together.

- James writes in verse 22, "You see that Abraham's faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did."
- That's just what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, when immediately after stating that we are saved by grace through faith, he writes,  
"For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

You see, for all the biblical writers, faith in Christ Jesus is meant to produce good works.

- It's meant to change our lives, and transform us into the kind of people who walk in God's ways and treat other people as He has treated us.

John Calvin, the great protestant theologian of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century used to say, "We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone."

- It is always accompanied by good works.

It's just what redeemed people do. They start behaving in redeemed ways.

- James simply says in his inimitable way, "And if someone calls themselves a redeemed person, but doesn't start behaving in redeemed ways, then something is wrong with their redemption."

I love the fact that James not only uses Abraham here as an example of someone whose faith in God led them to act on that faith, but also uses Rahab as an example.

Because Rahab and Abraham couldn't have been more different from each other in many respects.

- Abraham was the highly revered Patriarch of Israel, and a

highly respected man in his day.

-Whereas Rahab was a prostitute in the Canaanite City of Jericho, a foreigner to Israel, and a pagan.

But James says, they both exhibited the same kind of faith in action.

-Abraham when called by God, got up and went to a land he had never seen before, because he believed God's promise that the land would one day belong to his descendants.

-Rahab, if you remember, believed that God was with the Israelites and hid the spies in her home.

And if you remember, her home was actually a brothel!

-She was the town prostitute, and her brother was built right into the great thick wall that surrounded the City of Jericho in Canaan.

Those walls were so high and thick that the people of Jericho thought the city was invincible.

-But Rahab had heard about the way the Israelite people had escaped from slavery in Egypt.

-She had heard the story of the plagues that had fallen on Egypt,

-and how the Israelite God had dried up the waters of the Red Sea so his people could cross over on dry ground.

-She had heard how God had already helped the Israelites defeat the mighty kings of the Amorites and Moabites on the other side of the Jordan River.

In fact, all the people of Jericho had heard these stories, and they all knew that the Israelites were headed their way.

-But Rahab the Prostitute, of all the people of Jericho, actually began to believe that the Israelite God must be real, and must be powerful, and must actually be actually fighting on behalf of His people.

So she acted on that belief.

-When Joshua sent Israelite spies ahead of the army to do some reconnaissance work on the City of Jericho,

-Rahab hid the spies and protected them and told them that she and her family were on their side.

-And so when the battle for Jericho began, the Israelites spared Rahab and her family.

And not only that, she changed her ways, and became an Israelite, and married a nice Jewish man, and had a family.

-And her great grandson, would later be the great King David himself..

-Which means that her great, great, great ...grandson would much later be Jesus himself.

You see, James says, saving faith changes people's lives.

-It transforms them, and it produces a lifestyle of faith and action.

-Men, women, old, young, Jew and Gentile, slave and free  
-black, white, gay or straight, prostitute or pagan.

Saving faith will change our lives and produce a whole new way of life.

And saving faith isn't just a long, past, private prayer you made in your heart in a Sunday School class, or at a Billy Graham crusade, or with a friend over coffee.

-If you prayed such a prayer that is a very good thing!

-But James is asking if the seed of faith that was planted when you prayed that prayer has taken root and sprouted and is growing into a mature and on-going trust in God?

Has it slowly but surely transformed your life?

Has it changed your attitudes, your values, your daily decisions, the choices you make?

And as James keeps asking again and again:

-Has it changed the way you treat other people?

-Are you quicker to listen, slower to speak, slower to get angry?

-Are you less judgmental, and more merciful?

-Less prejudiced and more compassionate?

-Less apt to just walk by a person in need, and more apt to stop and help.

And that's James' point today:

-If we say we have faith in God, but it produces no change in our life and no greater love for God and other people,

-and no fruit for God's Kingdom,

-then what kind of faith is it?

You know, this past week our country honored John Lewis,

-the civil rights leader of the 1960's-70's, and later the Congressman from the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional district of Georgia.

I think James would have loved John Lewis as another example of a person who combined saving faith with a life of action and good deeds.

You may not know it, but John Lewis was a Christian, who originally wanted to be a preacher, and went to seminary

and prepared himself to serve God as a pastor.

But first, his preaching professor at seminary said, “John, you have a lot of passion, but you have a funny way of talking, -and I am not sure you’re going to be a great preacher.

And then secondly, the civil rights movement was beginning to rise up in his home state of Georgia, under the likes of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

-And because of the injustices that John Lewis had seen and experienced himself as a black man in Georgia, -he felt compelled to join with Dr. King, and the movement of non-violent protest.

He did and soon became the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee back in the 60’s,

-He not only led the march at Selma, but also the freedom riders who protested the discrimination on the interstate buses,

-and then coordinated the famous march on Washington, at which he was also one of the speakers along with Dr. King.

-And through all of that, he was tireless in day by day, doing the gritty door to door work of getting blacks registered to actually vote.

And when the opportunity arose, he then took the next step, and ran for office himself in order to actually work within the government for change on the national level as a Congressman.

-Towards the end of his life, he said,

“In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring...let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.”

He was a brother in Christ, whose faith was lived out in action in a powerful way.

What will faith in action look like for you and me in this week to come?

-Hopefully it will start in our own homes in the way we treat those we live in close proximity with.

-Perhaps it will also seen in the little acts of obedience to what we read in God’s word,

-in a responsiveness to the promptings of God’s spirit throughout the day,

-in a variety of daily choices we make to serve God and

help other people in practical ways.

Yesterday, Scott Govoni and I went over to get an old recliner chair out of Beverly Nelsen's little apartment, -and put it out for the trash for her.

When her sister died, Beverly was given a much newer recliner that her sister had owned.

-But now she couldn't find anyone to take out the old one.

-Scott said to me at the Deacons meeting, why don't we just go do it? So we did.

Thank you, Scott, for calling us to not just talk about the problem, but to go do something about it.

Maybe some of you might volunteer in the community in some practical way this week,

-perhaps at Bread of Life, or Malden Neighbors Helping Neighbors.

Others might write notes to people who are on the prayer list.

-Chris Redford said last week she has been sending funny memes and jokes she comes across to the Davenport crew to cheer them up during this time of quarantine!

-I love that. She's thinking about others and doing something about it.

Who knows what God might lead you to do this week?

-But be open to His leading, and then step out in faith to turn that prompting into loving action.

As James says, "What good is it if we claim to have faith but have no deeds."

-When the two go hand in hand, it is a sure sign of a growing and maturing disciple of Jesus.

Let's pray.