

Mission speaks louder than words.

James 2: 1-17 and Psalm 1

I will start with some words of invitation from some people's favorite hymn and some people's least favorite hymn: "Come in, come in and sit down, for you are a part of the family." And for the record, here at Robertson-Wesley United Church, you can sit wherever you want. If somebody gives you a look just say, 'Hey why don't you join me.' Sit where you are most comfortable and know that it doesn't matter what you wear, what you bring with you, who you are, you are welcome in this place.

Over the month of September, we will be exploring the theme Holy Pieces. What pieces of the puzzle make us Christian? Last week we explored a document called holy manners. A guideline that gives us some ways that we expect people of faith to behave. We want our behaviours, our words and our attitudes to express respect, humility, patience, open mindedness, courage, and compassion and you were invited last week to choose one to work on. So, I hope it's gone well. If you forgot about this try again this week. The excerpt on the front of the bulletin today explains how we are to live this out. We first need to listen empathetically to others with our whole selves, physical senses, intuition, imagination and intellect. We then need to speak for ourselves only in the spirit of truth and gentleness avoiding unhelpful judgments generalizations and stereotypes, and we need to allow others to speak without interruption. Unhelpful judgments, generalizations and stereotypes are exactly what James is calling the people on in his letter. He poses the question, 'If you show favoritism do you really believe in Jesus Christ?' He goes on to say that if you show partiality then you are in violation with the laws of God. Now to put some more practical terms for those of you who are parents, do you have a favourite child? I am assured by my own parents that they don't and if they do we both are the favorites. So, of course you don't show partiality within your own family the same could be said about our church family. "Favoritism goes against godly living."¹

If we look at Jesus ministry on Earth it was clear that Jesus did not show partiality or favoritism for he ate with the unclean and he ate with the priest, he taught the children, he taught the Gentiles and he taught the disciples who were sometimes hopeless. He healed people of all shapes and sizes and from all sorts of backgrounds. Now it's very easy to say that we do not have any bias, but our actions often speak louder than our words. We are prone to projecting our own

¹ Haruko Nawata Ward, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, p. 42.

self image on to others. We cannot assume for instance the person sitting next to us is living the same type of life that we are. Often, we have no idea what that person sitting next to us is facing day to day. Are their basic needs being met? Do they have a supportive family supporting them through some of the challenges of life? Are they healthy? Are they afraid? Is their outward appearance an accurate reflection of what is going on inside? Friends, we often makes snap judgments about how a person is doing by what there wearing, what they look like, what is on their face, "See, I'm fine." (*Smiles at the crowd in an exaggerated way*) But take a minute, and consider what generalizations and stereotypes direct your own actions. Do you unconsciously avoid certain things or people because of stereotypes that have been perpetuated in your family or in society? It's easy to do and I have no doubt that we will all done it sometimes fully aware that we're doing it and other times completely unaware. So, what are some of the assumptions you hold about what a Christian is, what a Christian looks like? What stereotypes do you think exist in our society about Christians? Here's a few of my top ones; Christians are judgmental, Christians always help others and are always nice. I have also been told many times that it is my Christian duty to give people whatever they ask for without question. Are these assumptions true?

Saying that we are Christian and being Christian are often two different things and the holy manners give us guidelines on how we are to act but that's not enough and therefore (I really wish I had dark sunglasses and nice black suit and hat right now as I say), 'We are on a mission from God.' Some of you will know what that is from (Blues Brothers). So, did you know the Robertson-Wesley is on a mission from God, that we have a Mission Statement, and if so do you know what it is? Here's a hint, it's in your bulletin right now; it's on a pink sheet. We as Robertson-Wesley United Church believe that we are called to do four things. We are called to worship God, to share our joys and sorrows, to learn and grow in faith, and to use God's gifts for service in the world. Now this Mission Statement has been guiding us for many years now, probably over a decade. And, I think it still rings true, but we may need to discern whether we've moved beyond that and are being called to a new mission. Let's reflect.

We believe that we need to worship God. You are all here and we are worshipping God, but we also need to offer a place for all God's people to worship, and so therefore we strive to be a welcoming and inclusive space for all people. We need to offer God our thanksgivings, we need to raise our voices in praise. This is what it means to worship. We need to gather with others not just by ourselves so that we can express our belief. For worship truly is supposed to be a dialogue. A dialogue between you and God, between me and you and the people sitting next to you. So, when you come to church expect to engage in time honoured rituals like our blessing today, expect to have conversations with your neighbours because we learn from one another about our faith. Be prepared to share stories that express what we feel and where we see the spirit at work in the world. Worship is but one place that we share our joys and sorrows with each other. We also share in our joys and sorrows through our programs and our outreach.

James in the scripture today provides an example of this when he says, 'If someone 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.' We are called to share each other's sorrows when:

- we gather for our monthly community dinners like we did yesterday,
- when we donate clothes, and items and money and food to the Bissell Centre,
- when we serve lunch to the seniors at the drop in centre Operation Friendship.

We also share our sorrows when we advocate for affordable housing in our neighborhoods and when we advocate for pay equity ensuring that all peoples basic needs are being met. We share our joys and sorrows when we name injustice in our world and when we acknowledge our own privilege of power. Our mission from God is not simply just share our own joys and sorrows but also the joys and sorrows in the community at large.

We learn and grow in faith in a variety of ways and we heard a short list of programs and activities during the announcements today of all the things you can do here at Robertson-Wesley that will help people practice holy manners and ask the hard questions. We want you to seek knowledge, we want you to truly deepen your understanding of faith. Don't be afraid, ask your questions. For we grow in faith when we listen to one another's questions with empathy and without bias and assumption. We grow in faith when we turn to scriptures as inspiration, as a place where there are truths, as a place where there are teachings, but we don't simply accept teachings without questions here. We learn from each other when we believe that everyone here is a part of the priesthood of God. You have all been called and chosen by God and are blessed by God. You need to share that with one another! I'm here to tell you that you have just as much experience and knowledge and gifts from God as I do, as Leigh does. Everyone has a place and a part to play in our faith community.

Finally, in our mission we are called to serve God by using our gifts from God. We talked last week about which attitudes in our holy manners we find easy or difficult. This can sometimes provide us with insight into what are gifts are. If we are the type of person that has a lot of courage we can serve the world by challenging bias and ensuring that all people have a voice. Sometimes it's the prophets in our midst who effect change and transition. If you are the type of person, who always shows respect to others and finds that quite easy, we might use these gift to help others explore difficult topics and issues in this world. We could teach people how to enter respectful dialogue where learning can happen. If you are the type of person that's full of compassion, you might use your gifts to visit others who are alone or who are in pain. These are just a few of the ways that are gifts are used; there are way too many ways to name at this point.

Now that you know what our mission is, are you in? Are you ready? How will you participate? Will you live out your faith through worship, sharing, learning and serving. For as James says, 'Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.' We thrive as a community because we on a mission

from God together. And we are committed to sharing our joys and sorrows, growing in faith, worshiping and leading active Christian lives of service in this world. Friends we have been blessed with an abundance. When I look around at all the people here and all the ones that aren't here today but are out in the world doing this mission I am filled with joy, I am filled with excitement, I am filled with hope. And I hope that James' words today, our holy manners and our mission will help you to find your way in this world.

Know that we have a plan! God has called us to it and all we need to do is say let's go, we're in. So, are you in? Thanks be to God.