

JAMES – FAITH & WORKS 8am

There is perhaps no more practical book in the Bible than the Letter of James. It struggled to get included in the Bible when the books of the Bible were being agreed at the end of the 4th century, and Martin Luther was never keen on it, because, he thought, it didn't speak enough about Jesus.

But we can be happy that the Letter of James did come to be regarded as scripture, because it grounds the faith into our everyday life. Did not Jesus himself say, 'Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but they who do the will of my Father'.

James reminds us that our faith, if it is to be real and authentic, has to result in action. As James says in our epistle today, "faith without works is dead." What good are words of comfort if they are not backed up by deeds of compassion?

In the cartoon strip, Peanuts, there is one incident which vividly illustrates what James is saying.

Charlie Brown and his friend Linus are walking through the snow, wearing their overcoats and mufflers. It's the depth of winter. They come across Snoopy the dog, sitting in the snow, shivering and shaking with the cold. They go over to comfort him. Charlie Brown, with hands in his pockets, leans down to Snoopy, and says, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." "Yes, be of good cheer," repeats Linus. And then the two walk on, leaving Snoopy, puzzled, and still suffering from the cold, and no better than he was before they came along.

And that's why the Letter of James is so important and necessary. It tells us directly that a faith which expresses itself in words only is no substitute for a faith which expresses itself in the actual doing of God's will.

Belief and action go together. The one is incomplete without the other.

In so many areas of church life, words can be so easily substituted for action. How often are good suggestions made and recommended, only to evaporate because they are not followed through by action, they fail to be implemented.

Elsewhere in his Letter James says, "You believe that God is one; you do well." But he says, "Even the demons believe that and they shudder!" Real belief is shown and proved only by resulting works.

The Letter of James emphasises that Faith & Action, Prayer & Effort go together, are both an equal part of being a Christian.

Today, as you can see, from all that is around us in Harvest Sunday. We thank God for all that we enjoy and have at our disposal but we also pray for those in need, the millions who are starving, whose lives are lived at the mercy of disease and pandemics, who don't have access to clean water or medicines, who live in abject poverty, who scratch around dumps and dust for something to eat. Yes, we pray for them but we must also be challenged by today's epistle, and ask ourselves what can we do for them, however small. Otherwise, like Snoopy the dog, they may be remembered but their situation remains unchanged. The exact thing that James in his letter says is useless and dead.