

“A Balanced Faithful Life-2”

September 29, 2024
King City United Church
Rev. Padre Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

Your Word is our wisdom; it gives us insight, strength, and courage. Open our hearts and our minds on this day, that we might receive what you want to give. Speak, Lord! Your people listen! **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: James 3:13-4:3

¹³ Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be arrogant and lie about the truth. ¹⁵ This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness^[e] is sown in peace by those who make peace.

¹ Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet^[a] something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

< Children's Time >

It's a beautiful day to gather and worship together! Though it is a little hot, we can all enjoy the sunlight that makes all the fruits sweeter. Last week, under the beautiful sunlight, I had a chance to visit a horse racetrack called Woodbine Racetrack in Toronto. Have you been there?

Tons of people gathered and cheered their horses. Actually, they bet some money on the horse races. Some people bet small amounts of money, like a dollar or two, wishing their luck, but some other people probably bet a hundred or thousand dollars. In that case, it is not fun but severe gambling. As race horses approached the finish line, people shouted, clenching their fists or banging their tables or safety bars around them. And as the games went on and on, their passion and voices were getting louder. Some even prayed hard, putting both their hands together. They definitely prayed because I heard the word "O God" in their prayer. It was not a joke; they were serious.

My question is, would God listen to their prayer? It's hard to tell. And most likely, I can say no. Disciple James shares his wisdom of prayer; here is his response. Please take it and read out loud according to the numbers. He said, "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures."

God hears our prayers, but if the prayer is just about what you get for your own benefit or for your wrong desire, God doesn't allow those prayers. Then the next question is, what do we pray for? The good thing is that the Bible has a perfect example of prayer. What is that? That is the Lord's Prayer. You know the prayer, right? Our Father who art in heaven... That is a complete guide for Christian prayer. Compare Jesus' prayer and the gambler's prayer for money on the racetrack.

We may not know exactly how to pray, but let's explore what true prayers are. And let's give thanks first in the season of abundance, the season of harvest. I bless you, my friends. I can see God in you. Amen.

<Reflection>

President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile of his and saying all the usual things at the White House receptions. So, one evening, he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with an extended hand, he flashed his big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely." or "Continue on with your great work." Nobody listened to what he was saying except for one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

My sermon has probably had some repetition, but that is not redundant lip service; it is an accentuation of the essentials of the Christian faith. I'm not going to say I murdered my grandmother this morning, so please pay attention to my accentuation. Last time, I dug into Disciple James' claim. You may remember. He said, "Faith by itself is dead, if it has no works." This claim seems quite contradictory against the Apostle Paul and the Prophet Habakkuk because they hold faith as a central theme in their theology by saying, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

I argued the English translation is incomplete because the nuance of the word faith is about abstract, while the actual meaning of the Bible is more concrete. So, I suggested interpreting the word into sincerity and

loyalty: The one who is righteous will live by sincerity. The one who is righteous will live by loyalty. That translation may lead us to more concrete, faithful action.

Now, let me move on to what faithful action is. What is the faithful action or actions? Sharing food and resources with neighbours? Loving and serving others as yourself? Advocating peace and democracy according to God's command? Pursuing spiritual freedom and fairness in you and in others, particularly for the marginalized, and resisting the systemic evil? Protecting nature from pollution or exploitation of natural resources? Executing an energy-saving lifestyle to live a humble life against a mass-producing and mass-consuming society? All sound great and are desirable.

I actually emphasized these themes throughout the worship and ministry. The good work will definitely be beneficial for us and others, including the planet Earth and its ecosystem. When we do these things, faith and deeds will be so balanced, and we may properly respond to Disciple James' claim - "Faith by itself is dead, if it has no works." So we could change his words and proudly say, "Our faith is alive because it has lots of works!" We support the poor, the marginalized, the victims, and the vulnerable in body and spirit. We pursue justice and fairness in us and in society, eradicating discrimination. We warn ourselves not to commit micro-aggression. We advocate the protection of the ecosystem. We practise a humble life, respecting ourselves and others. Voila! Our faith is literally alive!

Yes, acting and reacting bring us a balanced faith, and the balanced faith seems very active and alive. We all want to have this balanced faith. Right? If you don't agree, then I have to stop and go back to argue the previous elements. Please answer me yes or no - If you have other opinions,

please meet me after the worship service. Do you want to have this balanced faith, right?

(YES)

Yes, we all, including myself, want to have a balanced faith. So we do this, and we do that: hustle and bustle. Our minds and spirit for the work are so active, and we reach out everywhere. We are getting busier and busier for the "work" here and there and everywhere. And boom! All of a sudden! We feel so empty; we feel burned out; we feel apathy in passion, in faith, and even in church life. All the works undermine our body, mind, and spirit. And even the firm ground of all works, which is faith, seems hard to find inside. Is there any advice or anything for us in the Bible? Does Jesus say anything to us who wear many hats for the deeds?

I'll read some verses in John 6:

²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" What is your answer? "What must we do to perform the works of God?" You don't have to answer right now. If you have answers, just keep it in at this moment. I'll read the rest. In the next verse, ²⁹ **Jesus** answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." It is as simple as that. The work, the best work of God, is to believe in God who has sent Jesus. Believing itself is the best work. What is the best work, my friends? To believe God who has sent Jesus!

Is that easy? Is it easy to believe in God, who is invisible, inaudible, and untouchable? Do you think it is easy? It's not easy! Can you make

someone believe in God? It's not easy! Then, can you convince yourself to believe in God? I hope it's not too hard!

Christianity has been getting bigger and bigger throughout human history since Jesus' resurrection and the time of evangelization. Theology has been developed in many ways, even for animals and nature. While Christianity has paid attention to various topics, churches sometimes lose track of the essence of the faith in God. In that sense, for the first phase, I'd like to recall the mystery of faith that Jesus highlights: Believing God is the work of God, and he knew // it was hard // because the faith of God // is bigger than our rationale. Believing in God is not an easy task for modern people, particularly those who are in developed countries. But all the goodwill and good works of Christian churches and their members have a firm basis of the faith of God.

Because we truly believe in God,
we can advocate love,
we can fight for justice,
we can resist against the systemic evil,
we can be patient while waiting for God's grace,
we can have hope for the future life and life beyond,
we can love and serve others,
and we can see God in each and every one of us.

The source of all the good works is our faith. So, if you have faith and deeds, these two things in your hand, that is a balanced faith and will be praised by God.

Sisters, brothers, and friends! Both faith in God and the deeds from the faith are mutually important. Disciple James claims that, and Jesus reiterates that. However, if we only focus on visible deeds, that undermines our firm ground of faith. Therefore, my friends, let's do God's works, showing your sincerity and loyalty, but do not lose our faith, recall our faith frequently, and strive to hold the pure source of faith. Then, that passion and enthusiasm will lead you to true sincerity and loyalty in your daily life. Let us ponder James' claim, "faith by itself is dead, if it has no works," and Jesus' teaching, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. "

Let us pray silently.