

Note: The Rev. Caleb Kim will deliver the sermon below on Anniversary Sunday, September 13, 2026, at 10:00 am at St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: How to Become a Loving Church

In our primary text, the Apostle James speaks to us about how to treat people right. One of the greatest challenges we face in life happens right inside relationships. We want to get along with others and build meaningful, healthy connections. As a church, we want to become a truly loving faith community. On this Anniversary Sunday, God reminds us to become an even more Christ-centred, inclusive, loving church. Through James, He gives us both the problem we face and practical principles for treating others from God's perspective.

Let us begin with the problem, which James identifies in verse 1: "My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism." Do we catch that word? Favouritism. In the original Greek, this term combines two words: "to receive" and "face." It literally means "to receive someone based on their face" – in other words, to evaluate people strictly by their external appearance.

In today's terms, we could call favouritism discrimination. Whether we realize it or not, this kind of judgment is common in our culture. Sadly, even as Christians, we can fall into the trap of judging by outward appearance. We sometimes treat people differently based on their background – their skin colour, nationality, or ethnicity. We judge people based on age – whether they are "too young" or "too old." And in today's competitive world, we tend to celebrate winners and overlook those who don't come out on top. Furthermore, we often treat people differently based on their social or economic status – how much money they have, their reputation, or their perceived power. James illustrates this by sharing an example of two visitors attending a meeting – or, in our context, walking through the doors of our church.

In verses 2 through 4, James writes: "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand over there' or 'Sit on the floor at my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" Do we notice something powerful in this passage? James is pointing out that when we treat people differently based on appearance, affluence, age, ability, or achievement, we are committing an act that is considered evil in God's eyes. Both of those visitors are created in the image of God! Favouritism and discrimination are not simply social issues – they are spiritual issues, and God is not pleased with them.

It's important to understand this: James is not criticizing the rich man for being wealthy. He is not saying there is anything inherently wrong with having money or social status. What James condemns is the partiality shown by the congregation – the biased, unfair, and prejudiced treatment of people based on external factors. Once again, the problem is not the difference in wealth or appearance; the problem is in how we treat people differently because of those differences.

Friends, we need to reflect on this and ask ourselves honestly: "Have we as a church ever made visitors feel unwelcome or less important because of their personal heritage

or circumstances?" James makes it clear: favouritism is un-Christian. If we want to be like Jesus, we cannot participate in any form of discrimination. Why? Because in God's family, we are all brothers and sisters – equally loved, equally valued. Discrimination exists in many places across the world. But if there is one place where it should never exist, it is in the church! The Church of Christ should be a sanctuary for all people – regardless of who they are, where they come from, or what they have.

James also gives the deepest and most important reason why favouritism is wrong: favouritism is unloving. In verses 9 and 10, he makes it clear how seriously God views this issue: "But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." How many crimes do we have to commit to become criminals? Just one. It is like going into a fine china shop with a sign that says, "You break it, you bought it." It does not matter whether we crack a dish slightly or smash it into a hundred pieces – if we break it, we are responsible. That is what James is saying here. We might think favouritism is just a small sin, a minor attitude problem. But in God's eyes, it is a serious offence. Discrimination and favouritism break His law of love.

After confronting us with the problem, James offers a prescription—a cure for favouritism—in verses 12 and 13. "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment." This is powerful. James is saying: Live your life with mercy, because the same mercy you give is the mercy you will receive. He may have been thinking of his half-brother Jesus, who said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). As Christians, we are no longer judged by God's law that condemns, but by the law that gives freedom – the law of love and grace through Jesus Christ. Love treats people with mercy. Love gives people what they need, not what they deserve. And that is exactly what God has done for us.

Now the question is: How do we become merciful people? How can we treat others in a way that reflects God's love as we move forward as a transformed, caring church? These are critical questions. Thankfully, James gives us two biblical principles to help guide us.

First, Christ wants us to accept everybody just as they are. The first step to treating people right and becoming a merciful church is acceptance. Please understand this: acceptance is not the same as approval. This is a common misunderstanding, and many people—including myself—struggle to accept others because they confuse the two.

We can accept someone as a person created in God's image without approving of everything they do or believe. Someone might be living in a way that goes against God's truth—but that does not mean we should withhold kindness and grace from them. Jesus never approved of sin, but He always accepted and loved sinners. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this in Romans 15:7: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." That is where it starts—with acceptance. We must remember how Jesus accepted us. Did He wait until we had everything figured out? Did He only love us when we looked right, acted right, or thought right? No, Christ welcomed us in the middle of

our mess, with all our failures and brokenness. His mercy is unconditional and steady—past, present, and future.

Because of that, we must not treat others based on external differences, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Every human being deserves dignity and respect, not because of what they do, but because they are created by God and precious in His sight. Here at St. Andrew's, we are striving to cultivate this kind of Christlike acceptance.

Our Inclusion Statement reminds us of our attitude toward God and His people: "We believe that we are all one in Christ, regardless of age, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability. We welcome into our church everyone who seeks to love God and participate in an open and supportive congregation that is grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The journey of Christian faith is ongoing, and we continuously pray for God's guidance as we listen to and learn from one another." Friends, this is not just a church policy—it is a way of Christian life, a spiritual posture grounded in the Gospel... Jesus said: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

If we are already perfect, we may not feel at home here! But if we are someone who longs to grow, who wants to walk with Jesus, and who is open to learning from others, we are in the right place. This is a community of grace, not judgment. We are not here to compare our spiritual resumes; we are here to support one another as we become more like Christ. It does not matter where we have been or what we have done in the past. What matters is where we are now—and whether we know Jesus at present. If we want to grow in His love and mercy every day, we belong here. At St. Andrew's, we hold unity in the essentials: Jesus is Lord, and the Bible is God's Word. In non-essentials, we allow space for respectful personal convictions. And in all things, we show compassion, putting love above all else as we accept others just as Christ accepted us.

Second, Jesus wants us to appreciate and affirm everybody. This goes a step further than acceptance. Jesus wants us not only to accept one another, but to appreciate and affirm each other. When God created the universe, He filled it with incredible variety. Think about the richness of creation: over 100,000 species of plants, more than 30,000 kinds of fish, around 9,000 types of birds. He made the tiny hummingbird that weighs less than an ounce—and the massive blue whales that can stretch 100 feet and weigh more than 300,000 pounds. God loves diversity!

The Apostle Paul says, "The body is not made up of one part but of many" (1 Corinthians 12:14). Each part of the body is different, and each part is necessary. Can we imagine if every part of our body were the same? We would become monsters! It is our differences that make us healthy and functional. And it is the exact same in the church. Imagine a church where everyone looked, thought, and acted the same. That would be a boring—and frankly, unhealthy—place. God did not design us to be identical. From the very beginning, He intended for us to have differences, with a beautiful variety of gifts and personalities. So, Jesus calls us to appreciate people's uniqueness and affirm their God-given contributions to the Body of Christ. We are all important, whether our roles in the church are visible or unseen. The Church is Christ's body, and each of us is a needed and cherished member of it.

Let us illustrate this with a memorable story... The point is simple: we need each other. As Paul wrote: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). We are all connected. We rise together, and we fall together. That is how God designed His Church.

I once heard about a church bulletin that listed under the Worship Team: "Ministers—The People of Our Congregation." I love that statement! Whether we realize it or not, we are all ministers. Every single person worshiping here in this sanctuary or joining us online serves God's ministry in some way—through hospitality, maintenance, prayer, giving, or simply showing up in faith. Each of us contributes to the spiritual atmosphere of this church. We all matter here.

Let us add one final thought before I close. Whether we like it or not, there will always be differences in how we relate to one another—and that's okay... The Triune God loves diversity. He could have created us all with the exact same opinions—but He did not. That is why Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). This love is not directed upward to God—it is directed outward to one another. Jesus wants us to accept, appreciate, and affirm each other, just as He did for us.

When we truly love our brothers and sisters, regardless of our differences, we show the world what it means to be the Church. That is what God wants for us—the amalgamated pastoral charge of Glenarm and Fenelon Falls—to keep in mind on this Anniversary Sunday. Our church is far from perfect. We have weaknesses and limitations. But our church is full of people who love God and want to serve together in word and deed. Wouldn't it be beautiful if people in our community said: "St. Andrew's? That is the church where people love each other."

God has given us our revised mission statement: "The mission of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Fenelon Falls is to communicate faith, hope and love by supporting and serving our congregation and the local community and communicating our excitement in praising and worshiping God with our friends and neighbours." When we pursue this mission in unity, the Triune God will bless us, strengthen us, and grow us into a healthier, more loving church.

As we embody this spirit of love, acceptance, and shared ministry, we now transition into a special moment in the life of our congregation—the ordination and induction of our new elders, who are called to help shepherd and guide this body of Christ.

As I shared in my reflection on our fourth church anniversary, God is pleased with our consistent spirit of love and care since our united ministry began in August 2022. We are deeply grateful to the Lord for His ongoing provision, protection, and presence over these past four years and throughout our history. While the world might view us as a small church, in God's eyes, we are a vibrant, faithful assembly!

*In this sermon, I have used material and inspiration from Rev. Rick Warren's message series "Developing a Faith That Works" based on James 2:1-13.