**St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Perth**

**Sunday, September 8th, 2024**

**Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Prejudice or Partiality?**

**Proper 18**

**James 2: 1-13**

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Let us worship God, our light, and our salvation.

**The Lord is the stronghold of our lives.**

We desire to live in God’s house

 and to seek God in his holy temple.

**We have come with shouts of joy,**

 **to sing and to make music to the Lord.**

Let us worship God in spirit and in truth.

**Teach us your ways and make straight our paths**

 **in this hour of worship and always.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

Dear God,

help us to worship you today.

May we listen carefully, pray honestly, and sing joyfully.

Send your Holy Spirit

so that our words will bring you glory.

Thank you that Jesus makes our worship perfect for you.

Help us remember that when we worship you,

we are part of your family;

we join everyone who loves you

around the world and throughout history.

In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen.**

**Children’s Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Righteous Father,**

**we who own more than we use,**

**proclaim more than we experience,**

**and request more than we need,**

**come asking your forgiveness.**

**We seek your salvation, then act like we save ourselves.**

**We beg your forgiveness, then repeat our errors.**

**We experience your grace, then act defeated.**

**We rely on your power, but only in hard times.**

**We have become confused and misguided.**

**Forgive our every defection.**

**Bring us to an unbroken commitment**

**and a steady trust,**

**through Jesus Christ, who is the way of hope,**

**the truth of God,**

**and the life of love,**

**now and always. Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Take comfort in the assurance

that even those things that are hidden from memory,

or are too deep for our words,

are not beyond God’s forgiving love.

God, who knows us completely,

bestows pardon and peace.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,**

**Forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn #500: “Open My Eyes, That I May See”**

Open my eyes, that I may see

glimpses of truth thou hast for me;

place in my hands the wonderful key

that shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for thee,

ready, my God, thy will to see;

open my eyes: illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear

voices of truth thou sendest clear,

and while the wave-notes fall on my ear,

everything false will disappear.

Silently now I wait for thee,

ready, my God, thy will to see;

open my ears: illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear

gladly the warm truth everywhere;

open my heart and let me prepare

love with thy children thus to share.

Silently now I wait for thee,

ready, my God, thy will to see;

open my heart: illumine me, Spirit divine!

**Responsive Reading**

**Psalm 119:33-40**

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes;

and I will keep it to the end.

**34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law**

**and observe it with my whole heart.**

35 Lead me in the path of your commandments,

for I delight in it.

**36  Incline my heart to your testimonies,**

**and not to selfish gain!**

37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;

and give me life in your ways.

**38 Confirm to your servant your promise,**

**that you may be feared.**

39 Turn away the reproach that I dread,

for your rules are good.

**40 Behold, I long for your precepts;**

**in your righteousness give me life!**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “I Will Keep My Eyes On You”**

**Prayer for illumination**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Scripture**

**James 2:1-13**

**2 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” 4have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?**

**8If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

**Sermon**

George Orwell the author of many science fiction novels that comment on culture and society once wrote this in his novel Animal Farm, ‘All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.’ He presents us with an interesting question about our society, which we can undoubtedly agree with claims that all are equal, yet more often than not, does not treat people equally.

Can the same be said of the church? A place where we are taught, we are all equal in God’s eye.

Imagine a situation where you are given the opportunity to teach two different families about the Christian faith, but because of life constraints you only have time to go to one of those people. One Family lives in a nice house in a nice area, they hold prestigious jobs in the community and are regularly invited to social events. The other is in a more dangerous neighborhood, in a rundown house, they are unemployed, the husband is a drunk and the wife is pregnant with their fourth child. Which family would you go to visit? Which one would be worth your limited time that day?

Now ask yourself, ‘why?’.

This is the problem that James is laying out before us today and it digs into the very core of us both as Christians and as the church of Jesus Christ.

**James 2:1**

**2 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.**

As I have said many times there is nothing new in the life of the church. Even in the early church they dealt with the issue of discrimination and partiality.

As the popularity of the church rose in those days, there would be more and more visitors to the service. Meaning as the meeting house became more and more crowded seating would become an issue. To alleviate this issue the church had developed a pecking order for seating. Those who were seen as people of honor and prominence – of wealth – were given seats or stools. This meant that if someone of wealth entered the sanctuary late and there was a person of lessor wealth seated, they were required to give up their seat. If someone of lessor wealth, a poor person arrived, they were told to find a place to sit or squat where possible, and at times that meant that they had to stand through the entire service. So clearly the church has always had some form of seating prejudice.

However, what if we look at this another way. Imagine that you are late arriving at Sunday service, I know that is impossible, but let’s imagine. You walk in just as the children’s hymn is finishing up. It’s a packed house and there are only two seats available. One is beside someone who is well dressed, and you have seen around the community. The other is beside someone who is in their mid-twenties, with purple hair, more piercings than you can count, dressed in a tank top and torn up jeans, and you can see more than a few tattoos. Where do you sit? Why?

Both people are visitors to the church who have chosen to join us for worship and praise. Both people are worthy of the same reception. Both are possible converts to faith. If we were to treat them differently in any way that would be going against the teachings of the Gospel, in which we are all equal in God’s eye. In reality, if we treat them any differently that is just a sign of our own prejudices, our own snobbery, it is discrimination.

As human beings we find it far too easy to be partial in our attitudes towards others. We have a concept of first among equals that we cannot seem to shake, ‘All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others’ and when this creeps into the way that we live out our Christian life it requires a change.

Just look at our view of sin in this world. If someone we know commits a sin, we often find it very easy to justify and forgive them of the sin. However, if that exact same sin is committed by someone we dislike, it is unbearable and inexcusable!

Look at how we react to different people around us. How do we view those who are different in some way? Do we judge people by where they work? How about if they are single at an old age, married at a young age or divorced, do we treat them differently? How about the unemployed, what is our view of them? How about the homeless, the drug addict, the convicted criminal, or the mentally troubled, how do we treat them?

James is saying that anytime we shy away from someone simply because they are not like us, or not like the people we prefer, we are betraying our Gospel call to bring the love of Christ to all.

James wants to show the early church that they are discriminating against people based upon who they are. It is no surprise in this world, even from the earliest days, that the wealthy are treated with much more kindness that the poor. Yet the poor of this world are just as deserving of salvation through Jesus Christ as the wealthy. \*

**James 2:5**

**5Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?**

James reminds the church that the poor in the world are going to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. If we are not reaching out to the poor we are neglecting a huge portion of God’s people. If we are not working to bring the Gospel to the poor, we are neglecting our call to be disciples. God embraces them and we should be embracing them as well. Every person in the Church of Jesus Christ has been called by the Lord, and we need to remember that we are all members because of God’s will in our lives. So how are we given the right to pick and choose who God allows into the church? James is driving home a point to the early church. God will choose his people, and God feels that the poor are a good investment for His Kingdom.

James then goes on to point out the rich, the ones that they have been showing preference towards have in fact most often been the oppressors of the faith. So why is the church favoring them? At this time in history, the Christians were often hauled into court and charged with all kinds of made-up crimes. The rich controlled the government and the legal system and would use it to remove their opposition in any way that they could. In fact, many of the Christians who were sent to the colosseum went because of charges of cannibalism and incest, because we eat the body and blood of Christ, Communion, and because we called one another brother and sister in Christ.

So, James is saying if you curry to the wealthy, you may just be inviting more persecution unto yourself. The church needs to be careful not to fall under the influence of the rich, the powerful and the false. The church should not fall into the trap of the world and allow prejudice and discrimination in. And when the church caters to the wealthy it opened itself up to corruption, in that sense this sermon is rather time appropriate, a newly released book is causing quite a stir in the theological world by the name of ‘Shepherds for Sale’ in which they question the influence of the worldly agenda on the people in the pulpit, and while it may not be factually accurate, it does raise a lot of good questions about why the modern church is staying from the word of God for the ways of the world.

James is reminding the church then and today that Christians are to be subject to God alone. Christ alone.

James is reminding us that all deserve the love of God. To honor either the rich, OR THE POOR, more than the other because of their status is wrong. Any such preferential treatment, for any worldly distinction is wrong and unacceptable to God! Take a moment and let that sink in. Any distinction, any movement, that is based upon worldly distinction is wrong, we are all equal in God’s eyes.

Dividing us up, classifying us because of ethnicity, social status, financial ability, nationality, ability or inability, these are all the ways of this world. In God’s eyes there is only one division, the saved and the lost. The world can cater to the rich and frown upon the poor, the world can serve one person above another, the world can condemn and persecute, but the church has no distinction between people other than saved or lost, sheep or goat, wheat or chaff, and it is our job to reach out to the lost, the goats and the sheep with the love of Jesus Christ. \*

**James 2:8-11**

**8If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.**

Jame then goes on to explain that when we do these things, when we have a prejudice, a bias, or a preference, when we discriminate and divide people based on worldly things we are in fact sinning against our God. Remember all sin is equal in God’s eye. And one sin breaks the whole law, regardless of that sin. Keeping 99 out of 100 laws is not enough, as Christians we are to meant to try to keep all of God’s law. Just one sin is enough to condemn. Only one link in a chain needs to be broken for the chain to lose its purpose. So, if we fail in this one point of God’s Law, if we show prejudice, bias, preference, if we discriminate and divide, if we are showing partiality, we have broken the law of God and broken the chain.

So how do we avoid breaking the chain, how do we strive to keep all of God’s Law. James has an answer for us.

**James 2:12-13**

**12So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

Focus on Jesus, know that Jesus accepted us with all of our falls, all of our failing, all of our ingrained sinful nature. He loved us when we were hurting him the most. He showed us mercy before we even knew his name, and the only partiality, bias, and preference we are meant to carry in our hearts is one for the Lord our God. And when we do this, we will naturally begin to love one another in the same way that he loves us.

Love fulfills the Law. This is why Jesus Said

**Mark 12:29-31**

**29Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.**

Paul put it in the book of Roman’s this way.

**Romans 13:8-10**

**8Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Judgement belongs to God alone, and God will judge a person by what is in their heart and not what is visible to the world around them. We would be wise to remember this. We are called to love everyone, in the same manner that Christ loved us. Which means that we love them enough to tell them sin is sin, without judging them or having a prejudice against them for that sin.

Jesus loved each of us gathered here, saved each of his true believers, not because of the clothes that we wear, the job we have, the money in our accounts, the color of our skin, the family we came from, or any other worldly factor. God does not care what you families religious background is, or even what denomination you belong to, all that matter to God is your faith and commitment to Christ.

And we are called to show that same sort of love to the world around us as evidence of our commitment to Christ. God has called people of all nations, all tribes, all standings, all ethnicities, all divisions to be his people and they are all precious in his sight, so they should be just as precious in ours. If we are acting like true followers of Christ, we will show mercy and love to everyone we meet in our lives, and especially in the house of God, our Church.

I read a wonderful example of this, and I want to share it with you as we finish off today’s study.

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, conservative church. One day Bill goes there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans and wild hair. The service has already started, and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church is completely packed, and he can't find a seat. By now people are looking a bit uncomfortable. Bill gets closer to the pulpit and when he realizes there are no seats, he squats downright on the carpet. By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick.

About this time, the pastor realizes that from way at the back of the church, an usher is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the usher is in his eighties, has gray hair and a three-piece suit. He is a godly man, very elegant, dignified and courtly. He walks with a cane he starts walking toward this boy. Everyone thinks you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is silent except for the clicking of the cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't hear anyone breathing. They watch as with great difficulty the usher lowers himself and sits down next to Bill to worship with him, so he won't be alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. The minister says: "What I'm about to preach, you won't remember. What you just saw, you will never forget."

This is what we are called to be as a church, as the people of God. When we show the love of Christ to others, we are living out our call to be the Salt and Light of God’s Word in this world. And I hope and pray that we will all go forth and focus on that for the rest of our days.

Let us pray,

**Help, Enlighten and Guide Us**

Lord Jesus Christ,

my Lord and my God,

you know our weakness,

and that we cannot do anything

without your help and support.

When we depend and trust in ourselves

we fall into a thousand errors.

Have mercy on us in our distress.

Help, enlighten and guide us,

that we may see what is truly good,

desire it, and obtain it.

We commend ourselves, body and soul, to you alone.

With the Father and the Holy Spirit,

you are worshiped as one God,

forever and ever.

**Amen.**

*Source: Wilhelm Löhe.*

**Hymn: “Night Song”**

VERSE 1

In the darkness God will keep me He will stay and never sleep

In the darkness God is brighter though the night is long and deep

VERSE 2

In the shadows You are with me and You know my every fear

IN the shadows none can harm me for the mighty God is here

CHORUS

All this day Your hand has held me God of Heaven by my side

Thank you Father for your goodness You will hold me through the night.

VERSE 3

So, I find my rest in Jesus He who came to rescue me

Jesus saved me from the darkness I will rise to life with Him

CHORUS   2 times

**Invitation to Offering**

**Offering**

**Offertory Prayer**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn #497: “Word of God, Across the Ages”**

Word of God, across the ages
comes your message to our life,
source of hope, forever present
in our toil and fears and strife,
constant witness to God's mercy,
still our grace, whate'er be fall,
guide unfailing, strength eternal,
offered freely to us all.

Story of our wondrous journey
from the shadows of the night,
garnered truth of sage and prophet,
guiding forward into light,
words and deeds of Christ our teacher,
pointing to the life and way,
still appealing, still inspiring,
in the struggles of today.

In the tongues of all the peoples
may the message bless and heal,
as devout and patient scholars
more and more its depths reveal.
Bless, O God, to wise and simple,
all your truth of ageless worth,
till all lands receive the witness
and your knowledge fills the earth.

**Pastoral Prayer**

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,

we, your unworthy servants, give you humble thanks

for all your goodness and loving-kindness

to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation,

and all the blessings of this life,

but above all for your immeasurable love

in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,

for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies

that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,

not only with our lips, but in our lives,

by giving up ourselves to your service,

and by walking before you

in holiness and righteousness all our days,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord,

to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,

be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

May you, people of God, know that

God our Father made you and guides your every step;

Jesus Christ gave his life for you and brings you new life;

the Spirit keeps you in the Lord’s presence and empowers you to serve.

May almighty God continue to bless you and move you to give thanks. **Amen.**