

## Show the Proof

James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18

Do you watch those crime shows on TV? Shows like CSI or NCIS? Those shows always have a group of detectives searching for evidence, for proof of who committed whatever crime they are trying to solve that day. They know that if they want to get the bad guys off the streets they need to offer some proof. They need to show the judge how they are certain the defendant is guilty. So the good guys spend many hours and go to great lengths to show their proof and demonstrate their evidence. James in his letter for today tells us to **show the proof**, to show the evidence of our love and faith. 1) We show the proof of our love for others by not showing favoritism and 2) we show the proof of our faith by the good actions that accompany our faith.

The Christians gathered together to meet as they often did. Someone was kind enough to open their home so they could celebrate the Lord's Supper together, breaking bread just as Christ had. Later in the evening the young pastor will stand up to read the letters of Paul that had gone out to all the churches and also read an account from the life of Christ. But just as they are about to start there is a knock on the door. A Christian brother from another city in Macedonia enters the room. And what a brother this is! This man is obviously somehow very important. The man's fingers are decadent in heavy and expensive gold jewelry. His clothing is not the clothing of the common man, for no expense was spared. It was new and clean and made of the most expensive materials and dyes. Some of the people in the room quickly rush over to him and make sure that he has the best seat in the house to hear the young pastor. After all, this man obviously deserves the best they can give him. It seems there is also another visitor with the church today. Another Christian brother has arrived and he couldn't be any more opposite of the first visitor. Not only does this man have no jewelry but his clothing is barely adequate to cover him. What he does have on is dirty and ragged. Most of the people seem to be embarrassed that this man has even shown up. He stands in their presence but no one acknowledges him until finally one man comes forward to say, "Hey, why don't you go stand over in that far corner during the service or grab a seat by my feet here." And so the poor man sits down by himself next to the dirty and smelly feet of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

We can share James' outrage at this story can't we? How dare Christians discriminate like this? One person is not more important than another just because he or she makes more money, or for any other reason. Here at Grace anyone can come and worship without fear of discrimination. All are welcome. No one has to sit on the floor. Everyone gets a pew!

But can we cross the line between our own personal preference and the favoritism James warns us about? Are there some people that we avoid sharing our faith with because of their attitudes or place in life?

When I worked as a landscaper during the summer I would often find myself committing this very sin that James is warning us against. If I was eating lunch with my boss or our architect or any of the foremen of the crew I would have no problem praying in front of them before meals or inviting them to an event at church. But if it was someone who didn't seem to have as much going for them, if they seemed more interested in drinking beer than anything else, then I have to confess I would be far more embarrassed to pray and not as quick to invite them to church.

Do you show favoritism by having in mind a standard type of person who belongs in church, someone who fits the mold? Is there a certain group of people that we avoid sharing our faith with? Does the family with the well behaved children get more of our evangelism efforts than the family whose children are using bad language as they walk by the front of our house? Are we as excited about being a Christian example to that co worker who always has a story about their wild weekend? Or do we hate to be the downer and just blend in around him or her instead showing our faith like a light on a hill?

When temptations like showing favoritism creep up in our hearts we need to remember that we are all sinners and we all stand equally condemned. In God's eyes there are no favorites. As one, equal, human race, we have all broken the royal law, that command that sums up the entire second table of the law, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And it doesn't matter how we have broken this law, because James tells us that "whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

When I was younger my neighbors and I would play baseball in the backyard. We thought we were being safe by using the large yellow plastic sandbox lid as a backstop so no balls would hit the house. And then one day my neighbor foul tipped one over the sandbox lid and through the sliding glass door. It was a few seconds before his mom came out to yell at us for being so irresponsible to break the glass. I don't think it would have done any good to point out to her that we only hit a small piece of the glass, and there was no need to call our parents and ground all of us because it wasn't really our fault that the whole piece of glass broke. And when she got the bill for a new window she could even prorate us for the part of the glass we hit.

We have all broken the glass. It doesn't matter if we hit just a small spot in the corner or if we ran head first through it. We are all in need of forgiveness for our trespasses. But Christ came to live with sinners like us, and for sinners like us. Remember who Jesus associated with while he was here on earth? Dirty shepherds were there to visit him during the first few hours of his life. His disciples were at best uneducated fisherman and at worst thieving tax collectors. He shared meals with prostitutes and others who committed open and public sins. He even died between two violent criminals.

Jesus Christ committed no sin but loved all the sinners of this world so much that he was willing to take their punishment. He was the one who suffered damnation by God on the cross so we never would have to know what it was like to be left alone by God.

He did not do this for us alone but for everyone in the world. The forgiveness that Jesus won is for all people. So who will you share this message with? Who will you tell the good news that all our sins have been washed away, and God and humankind are now at peace?

There is an event at Grace this Friday that gives you an opportunity to share Christ. We are throwing our annual Spanferkelfest. It should be a fun time for everyone as we roast a pig and have some entertainment, but most importantly we will have an opportunity for you to invite people to Grace.

So who are you going to invite? Certainly invite your unchurched friends and family. Invite your unchurched co-workers and neighbors. Invite that person you know very little about or that you don't always get along with. Invite everyone you can, showing no favoritism.

In Matthew 22 Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet. The king in this parable shows only one concern as he throws this wedding banquet for his son, and that is to have as many people fill the wedding hall as possible. And so he sends his servants out to invite as many people as he can. Showing no favoritism the king invites even strangers from the street corner to the wedding banquet for his son.

May we show the proof of our love for others, as we show no favoritism with the message of Christ. Let us invite and share the message with everyone regardless of their station in life because we know that all people desperately need the forgiveness Christ won for them. In this way we will see the King's banquet hall filled with people celebrating what the Son has done.

Lutherans can be uncomfortable with the next section of James' letter. As Lutheran's we confess that we are saved by grace through faith. We know this involves no works or deeds on our part. It's no wonder some people scratch their heads wondering how can James say, "What good is it if a man has faith, but no deeds?"

James isn't saying that our good deeds create faith or somehow earn us salvation, but instead he points out that good deeds are a natural result of our faith.

Martin Luther himself said, "A man is justified, that is declared innocent and righteous before God, by faith alone. But not by a faith that is alone. Genuine faith will produce good deeds."

James gives us the illustration of a brother or sister who is down on their luck. They haven't eaten in a while. Their clothes look tattered and flimsy. If someone were to say to them, "I hope you stay warm and well fed." And then walks away doing nothing about their condition, we would have to assume that person was a liar. He didn't really hope that they would be warm and well fed. If they did they would have done something to help them be warm and well fed. Instead he is just full of empty words.

In the same way, faith, without good deeds, is just empty words. We may confess the Apostle's Creed every Sunday, but if our faith has no good deeds, no obedience to God's law, no compassion for our fellow man, it is a dead faith, a confession with empty words.

Jesus himself said, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit."

Last year at school I was trying to make my dorm room appear less monastery like so I bought some plants and pots, spent a bunch of money on good potting soil and some fertilizer and started a small garden on the desk in my room. I was really good about watering them and making sure they got as much light as they could. But then Christmas break came and they went dry for two weeks. When I got back they were all pretty wilted so I gave them a bunch of water to drink. Some plants greened up and flowered. One of them turned brown and crispy. It was easy for me to tell which plants made it through the draught and were alive and which one was dead. A plant shows on its outside if it is alive or dead.

So it is with our faith. An alive faith will show itself in deeds. Does your faith show itself with deeds? Does it show itself to be true faith? Do we show forgiveness to our fellow man as God has shown us, or are we secretly enthralled when we see someone get what's coming to them. Do we show our faith with our deeds by giving of our time, talents, and treasures to help others? James is not encouraging us to earn our salvation with these deeds but only to be what we already are, followers of Christ - men and women who have so much faith in Christ that they cannot help but follow him with all their deeds and actions.

What evidence do you show? What proof do you present? Would a jury read the verdict that you are a Christian who shows love for your neighbor without favoritism, and who shows faith in your deeds? Faith and love are not something that is just in the head or in the heart. They are something that needs to be shown. Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches. If a person remains in me, I will remain in him, and he will bear much fruit." Show by your fruit that you belong to the vine. Amen.