

Sermon 9:30am Sunday 6th September 2015

James 2

Aim: to encourage people to see others as God sees them as valuable

I will often walk around the parish with my dog collar on. I am interested to see the different reactions I get from others as they notice the collar.

I have had smiles and waves and a 'hello reverend Liz' from the children. I have had one person ask for prayer and another shout at me about how dreadful religion is. I have also seen some cross the road just before they reach me to avoid me. I have had a person say 'I agree that there should be women priests but there are just too many of them now!'

The different reactions I get are due to the opinion they have of clergy, of the church or of God. They are judging me due to the clothing I am wearing, the collar I am wearing and what this represents - and this produces a different opinion in different people. James talks about prejudice in the reading we heard today.

St Paul had talked about Jews and Gentiles in the letters he wrote to the Galatians. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus he says in Gal 3. But they hadn't quite 'got it' or understood. So James gives this example about a man coming into your church with gold rings...

Actually, the original Greek says a gold-ringed man, and what it's referring to is a common practice in those days where wealthy people would wear up to six rings on each finger to show their wealth.

And James is saying, "You treat this wealthy man as a better person, just because he's got more money."

God says, "That's wrong."

At some point some people carried out an experiment: They sent a young lady into a pharmacy. And they filmed to see what kind of response and the service she'd get. She went to the counter, asked for a particular product, and the person behind the counter smiled and said, "Certainly madam, no problem." So

they took her down the aisles, found the product for her, and answered her questions. When she asked for another product, the staff member took her straight to it. Nothing was too much trouble.

After this they did a make-over on the young woman, and through the use of good make-up, they made her look like an old woman. She hobbled into the same store, went to the same counter, and asked the same person for the same product. The attendant pointed, gave no eye contact and said, "Just over on that counter," and kept working. Through her persistence, she finally got the staff member to accompany her and show her where the product was. When she asked for another product, the attendant rolled their eyes, sighed, and with a reluctant walk took her to where it was.

It was very interesting to hear the difference in service that a young woman would get, as opposed to the kind of service an elderly woman would get.

Have you ever noticed how we tend to base our judgements of people on how they present?

We judge people on how they look, how they talk, how they dress, how much money they have, what sort of car they drive, and a whole range of other issues that God says aren't important.

There is a website that promises to tell us the 'Ten ways to seem smarter than you really are'. Some of the suggestions were to:

- Dye your hair brown as apparently Brunettes are perceived as smarter than blondes and redheads!
- Wear glasses: People think they make you look smarter,
- Make eye contact. Look people in the eye and apparently, they will think you're smart. But don't overdo it. Then they'll just think you're creepy and that will have the opposite effect of the one you want!

James remind us that these things are externals, and aren't important in the sight of God.

Have you ever considered the possibility that you might be prejudiced against a particular group of people? Maybe it's based on their race, maybe it's their education (or lack of it), maybe it's just the way a particular group of people might talk.

In his autobiography, Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was, and still is, dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday, he tells us, he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. "If

Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice turned a person away from trusting Jesus as Saviour

If we show discrimination we commit sin.

In the other reading we heard today in Mark Jesus chose two of the least valuable people in the world's eyes at the time to heal – a girl and a deaf man. Jesus saw them as so valuable that he took the time to give them exactly what they needed.

While one person can see a worthless drug addict on the street abusing the welfare system, Jesus sees a once promising intelligent young man who fell on hard times and made the wrong choices.

Or we can see a group of rioting protesters and think they are a bunch of uncontrollable ignorant animals who should be jailed.

But Jesus sees people who are frustrated because their voices are being ignored and their lives dismissed. When we see the world...we can look through our own selfish eyes and judge the world according to how it will affect us...personally.

What we have to remember is that God's measuring stick is vastly different from our own. To see through the Eyes of God is to see humanity as Christ sees humanity. With unconditional love.

So I encourage you to pray that you will be able to see other people through God's eyes.

What does God look at? He doesn't look at the way we look, He doesn't look at our face, He doesn't look at height, or wrinkles, or qualifications or failures, or anything like that. He looks at what you are like in your heart. He looks at who you are as a person.

We need to see ourselves and others as God sees them - as people worth dying for. God sent his Son to die for all of us, and every single human being matters.