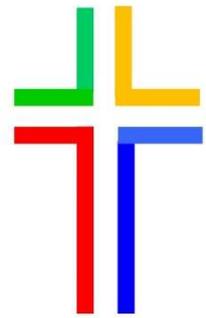


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 30 August



Faith in action is love, and love in action is service. By transforming that faith into living acts of love, we put ourselves in contact with God Himself, with Jesus our Lord.

Mother Theresa

PRAYER

Lord, how good it is to be here! How we love to come before you and to worship You.

Your word tells us that You take delight in us.

We come here with all kinds of different feelings and our lives can sometimes be confusing and difficult.

But You are always the same, always worthy to be praised.

So help us to take delight in You as You do in us and lift our spirits, so that we may praise You as we ought. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer.

READING FOR TODAY Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NIV)

That which defiles

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the market-place they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups,

pitchers and kettles. ⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?' ⁶He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.'

REFLECTION

There is a saying "Actions speak louder than words." Politicians use it a lotusually about the other side! Today's reading is about actions and words (see verse 6).

One cannot criticise the Pharisees for not living out what they believed. They were most careful in every moment of their lives to live out their belief in the Law by following it to the tiniest degree. They were always eating the right food and being scrupulous about what they touched, ceremonial washing and so on, because by not doing so they could make themselves unclean. In other words they were working through what they believed by what they didn't do.

This is roughly what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees in today. What you eat does not make you unclean. Who and what you touch cannot make you unclean and out of touch with God. All these things are neutral and Jesus expresses this in his ministry by the laws that he breaks by healing the sick and touching the untouchable.

He says it is what comes out of you that can make you unclean. It is what we decide to do that can make us unclean and out of touch with God. Jesus lists a list of evils that can come from the human heart and

these are things that we shouldn't do. However elsewhere Jesus expresses the importance of what we DO do. In the parable of the sheep and goats we are reminded of the importance of caring for others, because when we do that for the least of people we are doing it for Jesus. St Francis of Assisi is reputed to have said, "Preach everywhere without ceasing, and if you must, use words." Meaning of course, that we preach most effectively by who we are and what we do.

There is a great danger because a focus on doing can lead to believing in salvation by works and a vicious cycle of trying to do more and more to earn our salvation. The danger is we can exhaust ourselves trying, because we are trying to do it in our own strength.

We need to be constantly reminded that salvation is unobtainable this way as it is a gift of grace. A free gift from God.

There is another gift from God. The Holy Spirit is there to help us. We are not expected to do these things in our strength as that is the route to exhaustion, but in the Holy Spirit we have a guide and energiser.

This is the key. Faith leads to action, but not in a way that abandons us. The spirit is there to guide and support us in this action, just as it supported and guided Paul in his missions.

When that happens, then we are holding faith and works in the correct balance.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

The Bible tells us what are the marks of the true Christian. Let us ask God to help us show those qualities, so that others may see that we belong to Jesus.

Love and respect each other from your heart. Share what you have with those in the church who are needy. Feel for others in their joys and their sorrows and show the same concern for everyone. Do all that you can to live at peace with everyone.

Be ready to help those you don't know. Lord, help us to imitate You in everything we do for we want to be like Jesus.

Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good.

But don't hate other people.

If someone hurts you, don't try to pay them back. Instead, you should ask a blessing for those who haven't behaved well towards you; Even for those who go out of their way to cause trouble for you. Don't try to get your own back on them, but hand it all over to God.

Go out of your way to be helpful to those you think of as enemies.

Lord, help us to imitate You in everything we do so we may offer others the gift of life in You seen through our lives. Amen.

HYMN H&P 402, StF 696

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord,
for a just and equal sharing

of the things that earth affords.

To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom,
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow brief life's span.

You, Creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

BLESSING

Help us to keep our eyes on Jesus
and follow His footsteps.
May the Blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be upon you and remain with you always.