James 2 : 1-4, 8-9, 14-18, 26 (and Mt 7:24 onwards.) year B pent 16.

Faith and works. sermon by Rev Wendy Snook Sunday 9 Sept 2018 St Andrew's Berwick UCA .

Today (during the W@9 service) we welcomed Monique Churchill , through the rite of Confirmation or Reaffirmation of baptism, into membership of the Uniting Church in Australia in this congregation of St Andrew's Berwick. Praise the Lord!

And when Monique made those promises today, she joined the part of the world- wide church which we historically call 'Protestants of the Reformed tradition". Now Protestants got that name because of their protesting actions during the 16th century. And one of the things they protested about was the relationship between faith and works! So to me, there is an interesting connection between today's reading from James chapter 2, which is all about the relationship between faith and works, and having Monique's confirmation today.

Chapter 2 of James , written by James, the brother of Jesus Christ himself, begins by reminding us of the 'Royal Law', meaning Jesus' summary of the Torah laws, which is to love God and to love others as you love yourself. We know that Royal law, as did James and his hearers. Bur James says that in the early Christian congregations, there has been some partiality going on. By which he meant, that the ushers and the stewards gave preferential seating up front, and special treatment to the rich, who were well dressed, wearing gold rings and lots of bling, who were probably representatives of the Roman Emperor or the religious authorities. But those who were less well dressed, dirty, or poor, or smelly, were pushed to the back or the floor and ignored. And so James is very critical of this.

He says, (As paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in the bible version called "The Message),

" Dear friends, do you think you’ll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn’t it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, “Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I’ll handle the works department.”

Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That’s just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands?[[2]](#footnote-2) ----

And after giving some examples, later on, James says :

'The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.[[3]](#footnote-3)'

There's a marvelous little story about this about a man standing before God, his heart breaking from all the pain and injustice in the world. (*pulpit resources*) "Dear God", he cried, "look at all the suffering, the anguish, and distress in the world. why don't you send help?"

"I did send help", replied God, "I sent you."

So yes, we need to pray and have faith that God works on the world, more than we ever know. yes, we are justified by faith. But we also need to remember that we are part of God's answer to those prayers! For faith without works is dead.

So when you see a picture of a child suffering somewhere in the world, then just remember that poverty is what happens when people stop caring about each other and for each other.

Back in the Middle Ages, about 1200 AD, Christians cared for the poor deeply, as they saw Christ as one of the poor, too. But during the later Medieval period and Reformation period, up to the 16th century, it was a time of rapid urbanisation. People were displaced by constant war, famine, and plague, so the people were uprooted from their country homes, and pushed by circumstances into the cities, seeking housing, food, medicine, and employment. But only the fortunate found the help they needed. and the rest flooded the streets as homeless 'beggars'. But the sudden increase in vagrants changed Christian attitudes.

The Reformers taught an ethic of hard work and self-reliance. But many of the rural beggars were often too sick or old to learn new skills, trades and jobs, or were mothers caring for many children, and so they kept on begging. And instead of Christians seeing Christ in the face of the poor, many Christians became afraid of catching contagious diseases and possible moral decay. So the cities' authorities banned begging, and pushed the homeless to the edges of the cities. Out of sight, out of mind. Does this story sound familiar for the Melbourne CBD in the 21st century?

Next, while the European Reformers fought over correct doctrines, the world powers sent out traders like the East India Company and others, who explored and exploited the New World, bring back gold and luxury goods, like spices, sugar, and cotton and silk fabrics. They opened international banks, established unequal treaties with Asian nations, or almost no treaties at all, like in Australia. They forced millions of Africans into slavery. And the majority of the Christians at the time were unaware that these activities produced great poverty, displacement, and oppression in someone else's backyard.

But some Christians noticed and did something about it. They connected their faith and their works. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were strong Christians like the 7th Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce who stood up and used their political and economic situations to help those who were worse off than themselves. See photos-ppt.

Lord Anthony Ashley-Cooper, later the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, (1801-1885) became a Christian as a child under the guidance of his nurse. He is regarded as the most prominent Christian social reformer of his generation by no less than famous preacher Charles Spurgeon. Beginning with his investigation while in his twenties, into the desperately miserable conditions of the mentally ill and the insane asylums of England, and the frequency of which sane wives were pushed into asylums by husbands wishing to be rid of their wives, he chaired the Lunacy Commission for decades for the Reform of the Lunacy laws, to improve their situation. He campaigned for shorter working weeks for labourers, for women and children not to work in mines, and for children less than 10 years to go to school instead of work. For years, he worked to stop children being sold into slavery as chimney sweeps. Think of the story of "Mary Poppins". Those chimney sweep children were often sold as slaves.

Indeed, after Shaftesbury discovered that a boy chimney sweep was living behind his house in Brock Street, London, he rescued the child and sent him to "the Union School at Norwood Hill, where, (he said, and I quote-) 'under God's blessing and special merciful grace, he will be trained in the knowledge and love and faith of our common Saviour".[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Ashley-Cooper,_7th_Earl_of_Shaftesbury#cite_note-31) Think of that! 'Our common Saviour' means that he saw that an English Lord and a chimney sweep boy were equal under the Lord Jesus Christ. No partiality there!

Lord Shaftesbury also campaigned against the opium trade, for the reform of British education system, so people could read the Scriptures, and was a major supporter of the British Bible Society, for the translation and printing of Scripture in other languages.

At about the same time, William Wilberforce (1759-1833) is famous as a English politician, for standing up in the English Parliament every year and proposing a law to ban slavery and the owning of slaves. And every year, year after year, for decades he was defeated, because everyone else in the room grew rich through the work of those American slaves. But Wilberforce kept on campaigning, until one day, near the end of his life, his Anti-Slavery proposal was accepted as the law in Britain and elsewhere in the British Empire. And so for two centuries, we in Australia have followed Christ's royal law of love by not allowing slavery, due to the impact of that British law.

But now slavery is happening again world- wide, even here in Melbourne. There are young Asian girls who have been enticed by the promises of normal well paying jobs to come and work here. But when they arrive, they have their passports taken from them, and are forced to work in prostitution. We need a Modern Anti-Slavery law in Australian law today, because we don't have such a law ourselves. We Christians need to speak up as a group and as individuals when our political and economic systems force people into poverty and slavery.

*See photo.*

Let me give you another notable Australian example. Who has heard of Fred Walker? Fred Walker was the person behind the famous brands of beef yeast spread we call 'Bonox' and 'Vegemite.' Fred was a visionary businessman and entrepreneur. Born in Hawthorn, Melbourne, in 1884, he started his first business in Hong Kong in 1903. He returned to Australia in 1908, and noticing there was a need for good nutrition during World War one, pounced on the possibility of making a new spread, in addition to his other foodstuffs. He created the product 'Bonox', in 1918.

After various reversals in his business after WW1, he enlisted the help of Dr Cyril P. Allister, who in 1923, produced the trademarked formula of 'Vegemite', which was marketed in 1924. He then encouraged the American cheese company Kraft to partner with him, and they traded back into prosperity through the 1930's.

Quote- 'Fred Walker had drive and presence, but was uneasy in addressing groups of people—even his employees, in whose welfare he was genuinely interested. A workers' social club was established in 1927; morning tea breaks commenced in 1928; a modest staff canteen and first-aid facilities soon followed. Walker's introduction in 1932 of the Bedaux system of time-and-motion study was based on his wish to make factory-work less arduous. As scientifically-designed work systems increased productivity, bonuses paid to employees rose and jobs in the companies were keenly sought.

Walker was President (1933-34) of Melbourne Rotary Club, he was a supporter of the Boy Scouts' Port Melbourne Settlement for underprivileged children. He was a director of the (YMCA) Young Men's Christian Association and a staff member of the [Lord Somers'](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/somers-arthur-herbert-tennyson-8578) Camp. After some years of ill health, Fred Walker died on 21 July 1935 at his Auburn home. His will provided for the Fred Walker prize for postgraduate chemistry at the University of Melbourne.' (*Aust Dictionary of biography. Accessed online 8 Sept 2018)*

Now we know Fred was an ethical and caring man. There is a story that Fred really wanted a Cashmere coat, and he scrimped and saved until he could finally afford it. Then one cold Melbourne winter's night, he arrived home without his beautiful Cashmere coat. So his wife asked him where it was. Fred replied, " I gave it to someone who was cold." (*On the 'Vegemite' website and bottle label, 2000*.)

So Fred Walker's life shows a deep and heartfelt connection between his faith and his actions right here in Melbourne, even when it cost him personally.

So I hope today we will all be inspired to copy the examples of Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce and Fred Walker. Jesus cared for the poor, the sick and the needy, and so should we, in word and deed, in the world of politics, through social justice and in social welfare, individually and as the group we call 'the body of Christ', the church. Amen.

1. Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](https://ref.ly/logosres/message?ref=Bible.Jas2.18&off=3&ctx=ageous+nonsense%3f%0a18%C2%A0~+I+can+already+hear+) (Jas 2:18). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](https://ref.ly/logosres/message?ref=Bible.Jas2.19&off=6&ctx=and+in+glove.%0a19%E2%80%9320%C2%A0~+Do+I+hear+you+profe) (Jas 2:19–20). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

   cf Carine UCA (2000) James 2 sermon unpub. and Pulpit resources (Sept 24, 2000) and 2018 id census info. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](https://ref.ly/logosres/message?ref=Bible.Jas2.26&off=0&ctx=t+counted+with+God%3f+~The+very+moment+you+) (Jas 2:26). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)