

Being the Church at Brentwood

The Gifts of God

Ps 45:1-9 & James 1:17-27
(712, 726, 530, 563)

There is a pretty clear and direct message
in the Epistle of James.

It's this.

Faith is not enough.

It must lead to good works.

Faith is a gift from God to empower us to serve the suffering.

They may be widows.

They may be orphans.

They may be migrant workers,
agricultural, say, or domestic,

what our government calls temporary foreign workers.

They may be abused mothers and their children,
seeking refuge from domestic violence of various kinds.

For the next five Sundays we'll explore
what this collection of practical instructions
on living lives formed by Christian faith
has to say to us here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

The opening words of the passage we read this morning
set the assumptions of this letter clearly in front of us,
just as it must have in front of the original hearers centuries ago.

*Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven;
it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights,
who does not change or cause darkness by turning.
By his own will he brought us into being through the word of truth,
so that we should have first place among all his creatures. (17-18)*

There is profoundly positive theology contained in these two verses.
Goodness comes as a gift from the God who created all that is.

The love of that God is constant and steadfast.

It does not change.

God created us to play an important role in creation,
to be first among the creatures,

having a special degree of responsibility
for caring for the creation,

being stewards and caretakers of the creation.

This is the truth of God's word as it is put into practice in our lives.

This collection of Christian wisdom sayings,
of practical wisdom and proverbs,
might well be read as a commentary on the Great Commandment –
*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your strength, and with all your mind,
and love your neighbour as yourself.*

At the end of the parable of Good Samaritan,
which Jesus told to illustrate this commandment,
he said simply to the teacher of the Law
who was challenging him in Luke's account,
"You go, then, and do the same."

Every dimension of our being as human beings
is gifted with the abilities to love this way.
The presents from God we need in order to love in his service
are ours in abundance
because of what God did for and with us in Jesus Christ
and because of the continuing activities of the Holy Spirit
that make those presents real in our lives as we bless those around us.

There are two projects we are doing here at Brentwood
that build on this understanding of our humanity being gifted by God.

The first is our suitcase campaign.
This is a continuation of something we began to do last year.
We are inviting our neighbours to donate suitcases
to be used by migrant agricultural workers
to take clothing and household goods home to their families.
Last year we collected over 200 suitcases.
I'd like to see us get more this year.
I'd also like this project to spread to other congregations.

This year we've been blessed by government funding
to hire Seolgi Yu as our Coordinator of Community Services.
Seolgi has been working throughout this summer
to research and set up this campaign.
We've been working with the Coalition for Migrant Workers' Justice
and, through them, with the Agricultural Workers' Alliance.
It's not only a question of doing something to help these workers,
but also of making people aware of the conditions under which they work
and what might be done to help them access their rights
and improve the conditions under which they labour.
It's not enough to offer charity, but we are called by the teaching in the letter of James
to reach beyond mere charity to do justice.

That is how we practice our faith.
That is how we turn the word into action.
That is how we are blessed through our actions in blessing others.

So, I encourage you to look for more suitcases to give to these workers.
Ask your neighbours and friends.
Ask the people with whom you work.
Take a poster and put it on the bulletin board in your apartment or office.
Take some of the inserts and give them to a friend or neighbour,
inviting them to give us their old suitcases.
Invite them to get involved too,
asking their networks to get involved.
That's how this kind of project spreads.

Seolgi has also been working on another campaign.
This one has to do with collecting diapers for Dixon House.
It's a society that provides safe houses in Burnaby
for women and their families attempting to escape abuse.
It's a practical, everyday need.

When you see diapers on sale in the grocery or department store,
buy a package that we can give to Dixon House.
Again, ask your neighbours and friends to do the same.
Ask the people with whom you work.
Take a poster and put it on the bulletin board in your apartment or office.
Take some inserts and give them to a friend or neighbour,
Inviting them to bring you some diapers that you can bring to church for Dixon House.

These are a couple of concrete ways to get into the practice of gifting.
We've been gifted by God with a meaningful life of caring for the suffering,
gifted with all the powers and capabilities necessary to give practical help,
but also to take social action to change the conditions that make such help so needed.

That's what flows from being first among creatures,
caretakers and stewards of the creation.

That's what flows from having the Word that the Spirit plants in our hearts
flourish in our lives as they are nourished by the grace of Jesus Christ.

That's what it means to be given the gifts of God
at this table where we are fed for faith and work that glorifies God.

Come. All is prepared.
Jesus Christ invites us to gather and feast.