

**James 2 Works and Faith
Baptism Service/HC
September 5th 2021**

I thought I would share this picture of a baby Meerkat with you this morning. Cute isn't it? It was copying the behaviour of the adult Meerkats and learning how to be a Meerkat. We saw it at Drusilla's on Friday. There were also some very cute Otter babies being brought outside by their parents and clearly being taught how to behave as Otters should.

For a good part of my Christian life the book of James was my favourite because it is just so challenging but at the same time so practical, it is full of advice about how to actually live like you belong to Jesus! We have to learn how to live as Christians.

Our passage this morning is full of advice about how we should live as Christians. Firstly, it talks about not showing favouritism. The example of either a very rich person or an extremely poor person coming in to one of our services and how we might respond all seems a bit unlikely. But it is very clear just as Jesus was, that what we think, what is in our hearts, is just as important as what we say and do! I'm pretty sure that I am not the only one here who is guilty of judging others in my thoughts and sometimes in my words as well. As I said, we took our two youngest grandchildren to Drusilla's on Friday and my goodness, I made lots of judgements about other families. How they behaved, children suffering from obesity etc, etc. And yet when my children were growing up, one of my sons who has ADHD behaved in ways that I was constantly being told were well outside the normal range and some of the time at least were outside the range of what is socially acceptable. Let's face it a seven-year-old who climbs to the very top of a lamppost is just not normal and that was by no means the most extreme thing he did. Whilst of course I tried to modify his behaviour I constantly failed, and I know jolly well that plenty of people judged me and my parenting skills. Jesus said, "Love others, as you love

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yourself". Where do we feel love in our bodies? Where do our emotions happen? The idea that love and emotions are associated with the heart goes back a very long way. John reminded us last week that Jesus said, what comes out the mouth, comes from the heart. We do seem to feel things physically in our chest somehow, don't we? Maybe some of that is because how we are feeling affects our heart rate. Our emotions also produce hormones which affect how our bodies feel. But it is all coming from our brains, particularly the part of the brain called the amygdala. In fact we have two, one on each side of the brain. Generally speaking the right side controls negative feelings like fear, anger etc and the left side the positive emotions such as love but in fact they work together in quite complex way. The point is, that loving others is actually something we do with our brains. And we can learn to be more loving.

So, we know that we should love others as we want to be loved and judge others as we want to be judged; we sometimes call this the Golden rule. James calls it the Royal law, and by this he means, the law that comes from the King, from Jesus Himself and he says that if we show favouritism to others in any way, we are breaking that law. Let's be honest, we all have a tendency to favour people who think like us and behave like us, and it is a habit that we consciously need to learn to overcome. Here is the deal – judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who is not merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement. If you don't remember anything else I say this morning, remember this – mercy triumphs over judgement. BUT you will be judged by the measure of mercy you have shown to others, in your thoughts as well as in your words and actions!! Quite sobering, isn't it?

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And this leads us into the whole question about faith and works. Our reading stopped short of the part where James says, “show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds”.

You can be a good person, you can give to charity, help your neighbour, be endlessly selfless and generally an all-round good egg, but everyone does or says or thinks bad things sometimes, however good they are. And everyone judges others sometimes. The only way to avoid being judged yourself in exactly the same way is to say sorry to the King, that is Jesus. We have to really mean it when we say sorry and turn away from the bad things we have said and thought and done. Unfortunately, if you don't know Him how are you going to say sorry to Him? The other problem is, on our own, under our own steam, we might make a few improvements, but we cannot earn our way into heaven. Good works without faith will never be enough. We need King Jesus to forgive us and to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, not only can we really start to live differently but we can also be included in Jesus goodness. Only by knowing the King can we enter the Kingdom, there is no back door.

However, like so many things in the Kingdom of Heaven, this is not either/or. It is not a case of either you just have good works and they aren't good enough, or you have faith and it doesn't matter what you do. It is very much both/and. It is quite scientific really. In science, you have to be able to prove a theory, you have to be able to show that the thing you are proposing is true. If we say that we know Jesus, if we are now by adoption related to the King, then we are going to start acting like royalty. And in the Kingdom of Heaven, acting like royalty means treating others like we want to be treated. Loving others the way we want to be loved. Think about others the way we want to be thought of. Judge others the way we want to be judged. Treat others with as much

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mercy as we want to receive. We know that children do not always behave the same way when they think no-one is watching. As adults we sometimes think that we can do what we want, because no-one is watching. But God is always watching. Not like some policeman in the sky just waiting to catch us out and punish us, but as a loving parent, wanting the very best for us and wanting us to be the very best we can be. We can be the best version of ourselves, live the very best way only if we give ourselves to Him, trust ourselves to His love, follow His perfect ways and run to Him for forgiveness when we fail, because, His mercy really does triumph over judgement.