

**Sunday 2nd September 2018    Faith needs action!**  
**James 1:17-27    Mark 7:1-23**

Each week, as well as the Gospel reading, we have a reading from another book of the New Testament, usually from one of the many letters that were written to the early followers of Jesus. During September they will all come from the letter that James, the brother of Jesus, wrote to these early Jewish Christians that were living in non-Christian, non-Jewish communities, teaching them how to live as faithful followers of Christ, encouraging them to live differently from the hypocritical cultures they were surrounded by.

Although written almost 2000 years ago the letter has much to teach us about our faith so that we don't just grow in head knowledge but also live it out through practical deeds and acts of service.

We are going to think briefly this morning about verses 23+24

'For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.'

For all of us there are, all around us, MANY different mirrors and reflective surfaces where we can catch a momentary glance, we can see if our hair is still neat and tidy or our tie still straight or.... There are those that we can gaze into for more time like when we are having a hair cut or doing the morning ablutions!

We can even use our mobile phones to check out if we are still looking our best!!

A mirror's purpose is to reflect reality so that we can, if we need to, or choose to, adjust or change that reality!

Our phones can use filters to change how we look superficially! ... at Christmas I was introduced into the wonderful world of snapchat !!!

We can make ourselves look different to change people's perceptions of us... this is not reality.

There are some mirrors that are far more complementary than others. Some mirrors in shop changing rooms are deliberately chosen to make people look at their very best in order to increase trade!!

Some mirrors make us feel comfortable and others most certainly do not!

Our culture holds up metaphorical mirrors to us all the time.

Social media, traditional forms of media such as papers and magazines, advertising, they all communicate ideals and make us reflect on how we compare to these ideals

What we wear... where we shop... what car we drive... where we live...

For example in 2017 the BBC did a survey and proclaimed that 2 of the best places to live in Britain were Bristol and Dover

Just this week I heard part of a programme on Radio 4 talking about the places in UK that had the most pawn broker shops and why. Plymouth was almost the bottom of the list.

If you lived in Bristol how would you feel... in the top 2 :-)

What about if you lived in Plymouth... :-(

The many different mirrors that our culture holds up, make us think about how our lives reflect these ideals.

Just as we may have a preferred mirror to look in that is more complimentary in its reflection of us physically - makes us look slimmer or taller or healthier skin colour, so too we may have preferred mirrors socially and morally that we choose because they make reflect us in ways that are more comfortable or more easily acceptable.

The Bible can be one of the hardest mirrors for us to spend time carefully looking into because what it reflects of our lives is not always comfortable or easy. In fact it can be very challenging and needs a lot of courage on our part to keep looking in to it.

The Bible has much teaching about how we spend our time, how we use our money, how we speak, how we conduct ourselves sexually. When we use the Bible as our moral and spiritual mirror it reveals things about us and within us that do not reflect Jesus, some of those things are mentioned at the end of our reading from Mark today...

*Coming out of a human heart are evil schemes, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, treachery, debauchery, jealousy, slander, arrogance, and recklessness. All these corrupt things emerge from within and constantly pollute a person. James 1:23+24 (The Passion)*

Being a Christian, a life long follower of Christ, involves tough and lifelong decisions that need to come from our inner being and they may not match up to what our culture is saying to us. But that they WILL reflect the image of Christ to those around us.

In today's reading from James he reminds us that to be followers of Christ, to reflect the purity of God the Father we need to care for orphans and widows in their distress.

These were people that were powerless in society and unless someone cared for them they would be reduced to begging or selling themselves as slaves or they would starve to death.

I have asked Georgie to come and share briefly something of the work she is involved in in Kenya with Widows and Orphans.

Georgie...

- Why are you living in Kenya? When did you first know that you would live there and how?
- What are you doing with widows and orphans?
- Is there a personal cost to listening to God and then stepping out to serve Him?
- What can we pray for?

James urges us not just to hear the word of God but to listen to it carefully, consider it and then act upon it. God is not calling us all to widows and orphans in Kenya but He IS calling us all to act upon what we hear so that we may reflect more and more clearly and accurately the person of Christ to all those we meet.

Let us not be hearers that forget.... but doers who act. (vs.25)