

James 1:17-27

Actions speak louder than words

In the first chapter of his practical letter, James reminds us that all good gifts come from God. Those who receive them should acknowledge this in the way they live their lives, putting their faith into action by being doers of the word and not merely hearers.



WATCH

Watch *Turning Red* (Disney Pixar 2022). What are the big feelings that you find difficult to control? What happens when you get angry? Think about ways you could make a positive change.

Read



This week, some Methodist churches will hold their annual covenant service. Read the Methodist Covenant Prayer: Are you bold enough to pray it?

Pray



As you read a newspaper or watch/hear the news, spend some time praying for those working to bring change or supporting people in challenging circumstances. These people are putting their faith into action. What inspires you to action?

Bible notes



James, the brother of Jesus, is the leader of the early Christian Church. As a disciple and sibling, he understood God's heart and purpose. As God's servant (v.1), his counsel is priceless and worthy of heeding. God is the source of every gift, which is perfect, exactly what is needed and dispensed from heaven. These gifts are not the result of human generosity, personal talent, hard work or good fortune, but are blessings from God. Furthermore, God has given us the greatest gift, Jesus, the word of truth. James' readers understood that the 'first fruits' conveys a special status of being set aside as belonging to God (v.18). The invaluable gift is for God's exclusive purpose, and recipients' actions will speak more powerfully and louder than their words. The habits and behaviours James describes are not a figment of his imagination but those inherent in the cultures these Christians inhabited. There might also be no discernible difference between 'the first fruit' and the rotten fruit.

The newfound status of these believers might invite hostility and pressure. It might also lead to arrogance, entitlement and superiority. However, the 'first fruit' should produce God's righteousness (v.19) and, with humility, embrace God's embedded (implanted) word (v.21). While the implanted word saves the soul, James' central theme (v.23ff) focuses on the proclaimed word, which is not personal or private but communal and public. The impact is devastating when God's word is maligned, ignored or forgotten, as is the frustration of God's purpose. There is a blessing in persevering – pushing through against the odds – being doers of the word (vv.22-25), controlling our tongues, looking after the vulnerable and not being tarnished by prevailing cultures.

First impressions

- What helps healthy plants to grow?
- What in your own life needs pruning or nurturing for spiritual growth in the future?
- How can God's word take root in you this week?



A sending out prayer

Holy God,
we pray for opportunities this week to use our hands,
in helping and comforting, teaching and guiding others,
so that our actions show that we want to build your kingdom.
Amen.

Write

As a new school year begins, write a list of good habits you want to work on this year – for yourself (your reactions) and for others (your actions). Why not write them out and decorate them and put them somewhere you'll see them regularly?