



'Worship at home' Sunday September 8th 2024



As we come to worship, we remember we are children of God, part of the body of Christ, called to love generously and graciously as we live in faith.

Opening

We come to worship;

to learn and grow as the people of God.

We come to be challenged and renewed;

We come to be comforted and blessed.

We come to be nourished and sustained;

We come to be equipped and empowered.

We come to put aside our distinctions and differences;

and show compassion and love to all.

We come in order to be sent out;

to live our lives of faith in all we do and say,

and in all of who we are.

DON'T
JUDGE
A BOOK
BY ITS
COVER

Have you ever formed expectations of someone based on first impressions that has proven to be mistaken?

It is too easy to evaluate people based on superficial and unimportant characteristics. The author of James warns us against treating people differently based on how they look, their worldly possessions, or the size of their bank accounts: these things do not determine a person's character, worth or value.

James 2:1-10, 14-17

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favour some

people over others? For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and 1

expensive jewellery, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonour the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love

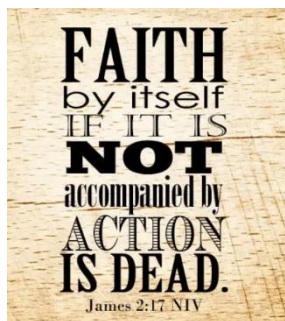
your neighbour as yourself." But if you favour some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law. For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. *New Living Translation*

We are reminded that in the counter-cultural kingdom of God, the poor shall be rich, the weak shall be strong and the meek inherit the earth. We need to put aside our human expectations and judgements and learn to see each other as God sees us: forgiven, loved, grace-filled children of God. We are called to love generously, without limits. However, generous love is more than

Do not ask God
to guide your
footsteps...

If you're not willing
to move your feet.

simply an attitude or emotion. Generous love prompts action, as we live out our faith with our words and our deeds. As the author of James reminds us, "faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless." 2



When has another put themselves out to help you? How did it make you feel?
When have you put yourself out to help another? How did it make you feel?

We are challenged to consider how we will live out our faith together, in ways that reflect God's merciful and generous love and are inclusive of all.

Mark 7:24-37

Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know which house he was staying in, but he couldn't keep it a secret. Right away a woman who had heard about him came and fell at his feet. Her little girl was possessed by an evil spirit, and she begged him to cast out the demon from her daughter. Since she was a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia, Jesus told her, "First I should feed the children—my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are allowed to eat the scraps from the children's plates." "Good answer!" he said. "Now go home, for the demon has left your daughter." And when she arrived home, she found her little girl lying quietly in bed, and the demon was

gone. Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns. A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him. Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man's tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, which means, "Be opened!" Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly! Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. They were completely amazed and said again and again, "Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak." ^{NLT}

These two stories are challenging, as we see Jesus's interaction with two outsiders who are in need of healing and inclusion. As a Gentile woman, this woman should have been excluded from the gathering. Jesus challenged her and yet heard her plea and responded. The deaf man, excluded and cut off from the world by his inability to communicate with others, found himself healed and restored to wholeness and community through Jesus' act of grace. Children, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slaves and free, sinners and outcasts and tax collectors are all welcome in God's inclusive kingdom. God's love is generous and without limits.

When have you felt excluded by others?

Why was this?

**When might you have excluded others,
even unknowingly?**



Reflect on how well your community welcomes “outsiders” or those who do not usually “belong”? How might you seek to be even more welcoming and inclusive than you already are? How might you love even more generously, even those whom you find different, challenging or confronting? What practical steps could you take to live this out?



Pray for: those who feel excluded, alone, unloved, fearful, unwell, frustrated, despairing, oppressed.
Pray that they may know God's healing and grace.

Closing

As you have been fed, go to feed the hungry.

As you have been set free, go to set free the imprisoned.

As you have been received – give.

As you have heard – proclaim.

And the blessing which you have received
from the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit
be always with you. Amen.

~ written by Rev. Daniel B. Randall, and posted on the United Church of Christ's
Worship Ways website. <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/> 4