

# *Putting faith into Action*

## *Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)*

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# Sunday, September 26, 2021

Today we reach the final part of James' letter. Perhaps we are most familiar with verse 14- Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. This is especially the case if you move in healing circles. And I must admit, when I first looked at the reading, I thought that this could be a good opportunity to talk about the healing ministry but then on reading it again I was struck by the lead up.

Are any among you suffering?

- They should pray.

Are any cheerful?

- They should sing songs of praise.

Are any among you sick?

- They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

It is more than just an urging to think about healing but really it is an urging to put faith into action. If you are suffering - do something about it. If you are cheerful - do something about it. If you are sick, do something about it. Simply put - have a faith response to your circumstance.

And I thought to myself. This is what is all about. Faith should cause a response no matter what circumstance. Unless it does, we could be accused of having a faith in the same way that we have life insurance - just in case.

So, is your faith making a difference to you? Is my faith making a difference to me in my everyday life? Being in Hobart at the time of Port Arthur, it was interesting to note the rise of the attendance at church in that week. We had over 50 at our midweek service at St James. But in a couple of weeks things were back to normal. The church was useful as a crutch in the times of hardship, but when things got back to normal - they were gone.

But I don't blame them because we often sell ourselves as a caring agency. Do not get me wrong, I have no complaints about the ministry of Anglicare and the Centrecare. It is a vital support for the poor and the needy, but it is not the church or a church. But we often see ourselves as an agency of good works. And in the mind of those outside, what do they see us as.

Here is the challenge. To be a Christian is not about be a person who has good works - despite the earlier admonition of James. It is about being a person who has a living and dynamic relationship with God through Jesus. So strong is this relationship, that it changes the whole of the life - shapes the whole of the life. Let me illustrate.

Much of my early ministry was with young people at and about the time in their life that there develops an interest in another. This in-love experience is quite a devastating on the life-style. The tom-boy becomes a young lady - the young man starts to take an interest in being neat and well mannered. Such is the power of this experience - there is the desire to

become more presentable to the object of our affection. Now there is a lot to be said about the problems of building relationships on impressions, but the power of the emotion is so strong that the life is changed.

Now our faith should be like that. It should hit us in such a way that we are changed in our outlook, and it is visible for all to see. This is more just social niceties, but genuine change and the added secret ingredient in Christianity is the Holy Spirit that changes us from within into the image of Christ.

In the past, Louise and I supported the work of the God Squad. It is an experience and a challenge to me. I remember the testimony of Wayne who in his life story revealed that he was drawn into Christianity from the presidency of Satan's Riders motorcycle club. The dramatic effect on his life of knowing Jesus was a powerful statement of the power of God. Those who knew him - knew he was different and why.

It is more than being good and kind and caring. More than being respectable and valuable members of the community. We will blend into the background if that is the case. Unless the world can see that Jesus makes a difference, then we are powerless to make a difference in our community.

James urges us to have a faith response. When all is going right – then sing songs of praise. Focus our good fortune on the favour of God and praise him for it. Do not allow the good things to go unnoticed. And if things are not so good - react with the understanding even then God is in control. Pray and make the prayer real.

I am not talking about a *holy than thou* parade of religion, but it should be the greatest influence on how we live out our lives. We should have a visible interlinking with God in the everyday life that is before us.

And if we did this well... what do you think would happen here on the peninsula?

Let us take heart from James' teaching of practical Christianity and seek to live out lives visibly influenced by the power and the presence of God.

Let us respond our circumstances with a reaction of faith and challenge those around us to seek this for themselves.

Perhaps this is a little academic so think of it in terms of the infectious joy when Australia wins Gold. Until our faith is that influential, we will struggle to make a difference.

**AMEN**