

**6th September, 2015.**

**Reading: James 2: 1 - 10, 14 – 17**

**Sermon: Living Out our Faith**

One of the wee towns I visited in the Harz region of Germany, in the rain, I hasten to add, was Wittenberg. The centre of the town, the part which has been renovated, is lovely, and well worth a visit.

It was in Wittenberg that Luther challenged many of the beliefs held by the Catholic Church by pinning his 98 theses to the door of the Palace Church. His own Church was down the street and from there he could reach the general public who attended worship in his Church but not those with the power, not the aristocracy, hence the Palace Church door. They couldn't help seeing what he had to say as they entered their Church.

Those theses are now carved into what is a new door on the Palace Church as a reminder of the beliefs which Luther had, beliefs which were contrary to those held by the Catholic Church, but beliefs which ultimately led to the reformation and the Protestant faith.

One of the beliefs Luther held and which we also hold is that we are saved by faith. As a result, he called James' letter, from which we read this

morning, 'an epistle of straw'. Luther wasn't what you would call terribly complimentary at times!

Luther was critical of James' letter because he said it spoke about the law of Moses, rather than the grace of God and about the importance of works, rather than faith. However, James wasn't saying that faith was unimportant. As I see it, James was simply saying that faith bears fruit. If there is no evidence of faith, if there are no works, then our faith is dead. As James tells us, faith must be accompanied by actions. We all know that.

Faith is something we live out and not just a set of beliefs. For example, James says that to say to someone who is hungry and homeless, **Go in Peace**, is pointless if we leave them hungry and cold.

Last week, I preached on the need for the Church and nation to reach out to the Syrian refugees who are risking life and limb to escape the devastation and the war and the torture they face in their own land.

This week we have heard that there has been an increase in the number of refugees being allowed in to Britain and there are many folk who have offered a room in their homes to those needing accommodation, not to mention many in other European countries who are doing what they can to help.

This week, a group has been set up in Argyll and more specifically, in Lochgilphead, called Argyll - Help for Syrian Refugees and the community has rallied round. From Campbeltown to Tarbert, from Lochgilphead to Taynuilt and other places en route, people are collecting what is needed to make life slightly more bearable for the refugees who have lost everything. Some are raising money. Some are looking out material things which are needed for survival. I doubt if any of us, despite the various losses we have suffered, I doubt if any of us have ever lost everything even if it has felt like it at times.

Following a spell of illness, it was understanding that we can lose everything which took me into the ministry in the first place. We can lose the ability to see and speak, to move around and do things for ourselves. We can lose our families, our friends, our homes. We can lose everything. The only thing which no one can take from us is our faith. I can give up my faith but no one can take it from me.

It was that journey through illness that led me to deciding that my faith had to be worth sharing and worth living out. How well I do that is another story.

Living out our faith is perhaps the challenge that the Church today needs to meet, and by the Church I mean you and me.

You will see in my letter in the Link this month that I believe we have an opportunity, as we move to a Unitary Constitution, to reassess what we are doing and to move forward as a Church by looking for ways in which we can reach out and live out our faith in the 21st Century.

We need to find ways of reaching out to all ages. There was a time when we would have said that it was the young we needed to reach because the older generation was already in Church but that is no longer the case. In the present age, we have to find ways of reaching young and old and everyone in between and that means all of us living out our faith in a way which allows people to see the fruits of our faith.

All of us need to be committed to outreach, whatever form it takes. We are called to follow Jesus and to walk in His footsteps which means sharing the good news, showing compassion, loving our neighbour as ourselves, forgiving and showing mercy.

People's backgrounds are irrelevant. We are called to love our neighbour whatever their background, whatever their race, whatever their

faith, whoever they are, and wherever they come from.

How do we reach out to the Travellers who live within our community? We have a couple of girls at Bumps and Babies with their wee ones but how do we reach the different generations. There used to be a Chaplain to the Travellers in Scotland but she couldn't be everywhere at once even if she wanted to be. She may well be retired now. She was older than me and I heard about her work when I was in Drumchapel. We have a responsibility to the Travellers who live in our parish.

How do we reach those who feel secure because they have a healthy bank balance and think they have all that they need? How do we reach those who feel they are self-sufficient and have no need of God?

How do we reach those who have been hurt by life, who feel let down by the Church, who feel God is against them? How do we share His love with them?

How do we reach the teenagers in our area and the young families who have never had a Church connection and who have little or no concept of Church or God or faith?

In the past, missionaries went abroad to share their faith with people in other nations. We need

missionaries here, now. We need people who will commit their time and their energy to sharing their faith in the western world unless, of course, we are willing to do that ourselves.

We need to learn to be the Church and not simply to come to Church. I'm not asking people to go out with billboards preaching that the end of the world is nigh but I am asking that we witness to what we believe and that we show people that faith makes a difference to us and to life.

One criticism Luther could have directed at James is this. James says in verse 8: **If you keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' you are doing right.** That is true but it is only part of the story. The rest of the law says: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind.** We need to get that balance right.

On Facebook the other day, someone I know had signed a petition to ban compulsory worship in schools. As far as I am aware, worship was never compulsory in Scotland, certainly not when I was growing up. You could opt out at your parents' request, particularly if you were of a different faith.

However, worship is nearly non-existent in our schools as it is and if it is banned completely there will be generations of children who will

never hear of God, let alone know anything about Him or His Church. There will be generations growing up with no hope, with no knowledge that they are loved by God and they will have less idea than children have at present of what Christmas and Easter mean for us as Christians.

The responsibility lies with us to take the gospel forward to the generations of our time because if we don't I dread to think what the future holds.