

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 20, 2015
James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18
God has Chosen the Poor to Be Rich in Faith
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Dear Friends in Christ, chosen by God for birth by the word of truth,

If you were with a group of all your friends, would you like to say of one in particular, “I like this one the best?” Parents, if you had to choose, which of your children would you elevate for better treatment than the others? I am never supposed to ask my granddaughters, “Who is your favorite grandpa?”

Our professors taught us not to show favoritism among our members. They taught us that because they taught us God’s Word. Here it is. James warns Christians “believers in Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” We will look at two aspects of this under our theme, **God has Chosen the Poor to Be Rich in Faith.** First, that means God has not shown favoritism. Second, that means showing our faith in deeds.

Favoritism means to show partiality. What I favor is what I turn my face toward as I turn away from the rest. We are partial, for example, to a particular sports team, a particular grocery store, a particular style of

One group that often gets favoritism is the rich. Those early Christians were treating those who came to worship with them better because they wore “a gold ring and fine clothes.” James wrote to them, literally, stop showing favoritism. The wealthy got the good seats. To the poor man they said, “You stand here,” or “Sit on the floor by my feet.”

God forbids such partiality or favoritism in his church. Partiality is discrimination, or drawing a difference. It is the result of judging others “with evil thoughts.” There is a reason God forbids favoring the rich in the eyes of the world. “Has God not chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him.”

God did not look at our wealth when he chose us to be his own. God did not look at our social standing, or the color of our skin, or the language we speak. God did not choose us because we are poor in the eyes of the world. James is relating that wealth or poverty in material possessions has nothing to do with being in his kingdom of God. God does not show favoritism but died on the cross and rose again from death for all. He calls all sinners to repentance. We read in Acts 10 that Peter learned the same lesson in his vision of all the unclean animals in a large sheet God let down from heaven to earth.

As Luther asked, “What does this mean?” It means that as Christians and as a congregation filled with the knowledge that God did not show partiality for us or against us on account of our sins, we will not discriminate against others. We will welcome the poor. We will not play favorites when it comes to sharing God’s love. We will not show partiality when it comes to necessary rebuke and correction against beliefs or actions that go contrary to God’s holy will.

That leads us to the second aspect of being chosen to be rich in faith. That means showing my faith in deeds.

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” is the royal law. It is royal because it belongs to and comes from the King of Kings. We find this royal law in the Scripture. It means do what is right according to God’s law. It means not to draw a difference with evil thoughts among your neighbors that favors one and rejects the other.

We know there is a misunderstanding in the world, and sadly among our fellow Christians, that confuses discrimination with lovingly pointing out sin and rebellion against God. Christians are to follow the royal law of love. That does not mean, however, to be permissive of sin. We read in John 8 that Jesus did say to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you." But then "Jesus declared, 'Go and sin no more.'"

"Love your neighbor as yourself." That is a really big mirror, isn't it? Who among us has done that regularly, let alone perfectly? "For no one living is righteous before you," King David wrote in Psalm 143. We all play favorites. We all judge with evil understanding and intentions others who are different from us, or not quite who we want in our church. We sin. That royal law convicts us as lawbreakers.

James puts the result of that conviction right out there. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all." The law, the Ten Commandments, is not individual pieces but a unit. That unit is love. When I break one commandment, I break the entire law.

James went on to describe the relationship between faith and acts of love. God has chosen to give me birth by the word of truth. He gave me the riches of faith and the inheritance of the kingdom of God through our "glorious Lord Jesus Christ." That Savior became poor in the eyes of men, enduring the guilt and shame, so that I am rich in the eyes of my Father in heaven. That richness in faith, forgiveness and salvation, manifests itself in deeds of love.

It is not the combination of faith and love that redeems me. True faith produces love that does not just talk but acts toward all. Faith produces this charity. You can talk about loving your neighbor. You can wish him well. But if you do not help him, such talk is useless.

Just as useless is any claim of faith that does not show itself outwardly in love. "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead." Lack of action does not make a corpse dead. Lack of action shows that it is indeed a corpse.

One person may claim to have faith. It is impossible for this person to prove they have faith when there are no good works. James wrote that the Christian will show faith by accompanying that faith with deeds in keeping with the royal law of love. St. John wrote in his first epistle about this. "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar." [4:20]

God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. God grant that we always are rich in showing that faith by keeping the royal law and stop showing favoritism. Amen. <SDG>