

## Second Reading: James 2:1-10 [11-13] 14-17

<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>2</sup>For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup>and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," <sup>4</sup>have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup>Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

<sup>8</sup>You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [<sup>11</sup>For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup>So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup>For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.]

<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

## Gospel: Mark 7:24-37

<sup>24</sup>[Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup>but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup>Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup>They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup>He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup>Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." <sup>35</sup>And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup>Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup>They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

The big house. Now that we are fully into the month of September and the official day of fall's beginning is lurking right around the corner, when we hear that phrase "the big house" maybe we think of a certain college team from up north. Its nickname developed because it is said to be the largest sports stadium in North America. However, "the big house" actually has another meaning as well. When someone is sent off to prison we may say they were sent off to the "Big House. " Where this nickname all got started was due to a large prison built on the Hudson river near the city of New York. It is the famous Sing Sing prison. The name Sing Sing comes from an Native American reference which means stone upon stone. It's nickname, as the "Big House," was because the architecture of the place made it look like a gigantic house. The original cell block of the prison was built way back in 1825. However, this famous prison has not only given rise to the term "the big house" in our everyday references, it also has spawned a few other popular phrases that we use when referring to people who are convicted and are sent off to jail. The phrase "up the river"; referring to the location on Hudson river not far from New York City; and the phrase "the last mile" referring to the walk to the electric chair, for those in history who were convicted of crimes and sent to their death, all have their beginnings from this famous prison.

Well, you may wonder why all of this prison talk on this day in which we heard in our Gospel text about Jesus healing a woman's daughter of an unclean spirit and then a man who was deaf and struggled with his speech. While certainly these acts broke the norm for what was allowed socially, culturally, politically, and certainly religiously, for the people of Jesus time, it is not the only reference to being convicted by ones' acts in today's lessons.

In today's second reading from the book of James, it is hard to hear these verses from the Bible and not feel somewhat, if not completely convicted. Convicted not only as an individual Christian, but convicted as a citizen, convicted often as people of means, and convicted as a Christian people in general. Hear those hard-hitting words again:

“My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

Wow! Talk about the challenge of living out one's faith, this is certainly a major one. If it anytime, we as Christians get haughty, all we have to do is read these words from the author of James, and rediscover that we certainly fall short. I know that I certainly do, and I am guessing that many, and I would even say, every single one of us in this room also fall short. Again those final words: “If you show partiality, you commit sin

and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but falls in one point has become accountable for all of it.” Do we need to say anything more? I believe we all fall short, we all are convicted by our lack of faith, our lack of purity, our lack of morality, our lack of knowing that God loves every single human being that God created. It is what we mean when we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. It is the fallibility of our human nature. It is the brokenness of our ego, of our hearts and minds.

What then are we to do with such challenging words from this New Testament book? Shall we find a way to soften them? Should we ignore them? Should we focus on our Gospel text today and move on? These words do not lose their challenge to us some 2,000 years after they were written and are just as timely today in September of 2018 as they have been throughout history. Perhaps these are a cattle prod to herd us a Christians back into the pastures of faithful living. Sometimes we do need a little wakeup call.

Perhaps the window into striving to live out these words is remembering the reason why we do so. It is remembering the message, acts, life, death and resurrection of Christ. Like I mentioned/will mention in the children’s sermon today. We work hard not because we are trying to get God’s love, but because God’s loves us first and therefore we strive to live out that love. Sometimes it is so easy to get it backwards. Sometimes we forget the next verse to the famous John 3:16 passage. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

God is life. God is love. God seeks first and foremost to be with us, to love us completely and to claim us as children of God. We love others not to earn God's love, but to reflect God's love. It is so easy to slip into the mentality that I must love others, I must serve others, I must do this or that, in order for God to love me, to save me, to accept me. However, when we do this we are beginning to attempt to climb up the down escalator of God's relationship with us. God became one of us, God descended to us, so that our covenant, our bond of God's relationship becomes unbreakable by our actions. This does not mean we are then to surrender any action on our part – quite the contrary. We are indeed called to love the poor and the rich, called to welcome the poor and the rich, called to honor the poor and the rich, called to demonstrate that we all can be heirs in God's kingdom. It's just that we recognize we will not be perfect at it, even as the demand on God's part to do this, doesn't lessen. We are called to live this out. However, we know and recognize that we are convicted, we are guilty of falling short. This does not disqualify our faith and belief in Christ however. We still strive to welcome, love, and be compassionate to one another in the name of Christ. And while this proves to be very difficult sometimes to do, because, well... just take a look at us, look around us, look at our country, look at our world, but these words still stand strong. The call of Christ remains. May we be so bold as to act in this world as God call us to do, while recognizing that our actions to not glorify us, or exempt us, and that we are equally broken but equally loved by our Creator... and for that we thank God. Amen.