

Proper 18B – Put your money where your mouth is

1. We all know the saying, “Put your money where your mouth is,” and others like it
 - a. It’s a reference to the idea that our actions should match our words
 - i. But we know, to use another expression, that “talk is cheap” – big words and promises are so much easier to say than to deliver.
 - ii. Probably all of us have been caught more than once in a situation where we wish we hadn’t said something or promised something because we either unable to deliver on that promise or live up to the standard we set by our words.
 - iii. And it’s always easier to point out the failings of others in this regard than to turn the mirror on ourselves – to hold others to a standard which we ourselves can’t keep
 - b. That reminds me of a story I once heard about a man who died and went to heaven
 - i. He meets St. Peter at the gate and St Peter tells him, “In heaven you get a car to match what kind of life you led on earth, and for your righteous life you get to choose whatever car you desire,” – he chose a Rolls.
 - ii. A few weeks later St. Peter sees the man in heaven smiling away as he’s driving by and says to him, “Why are you still smiling you’ve been driving that car for weeks?”
 - iii. And the man replies, “I know but I just passed by my minister, and he was on a pair of roller-skates!”
 - c. We’re beginning a series on the book of James, which is the appointed epistle lesson for the next 4 weeks
 - i. And as Lutherans we don’t spend a lot of time in James I think because Luther did not care for it as much as many of Paul’s writings which he felt proclaimed the Gospel more clearly.
 - ii. As he states in his preface to the New Testament in 1522, **“In a word St. John’s Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul’s epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter’s first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.”** (LW 35:362)
 - iii. Luther has been unfairly criticized for that remark as though he wanted to remove the book from the Bible, which he didn’t.
 - iv. He was remarking on the clarity of the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone that is so clearly presented in the other letters he mentioned

while James speaks about the importance of a working faith that Luther was worried could be misinterpreted to trusting in our works for salvation.

- d. But be that as it may James does not present a Gospel of salvation by works any more than the other writers present a faith without works.
 - i. The letter of James is attributed to James the brother of Jesus, who came to faith after our Lord's resurrection; he became head of the church in Jerusalem, and was martyred in 62 AD
 - ii. The letter is written in a similar style to the wisdom literature of the OT offering practical advice about living out our faith.
 - iii. Our reading begins at chapter 2, but I think the theme of the letter can best be summed up in the first chapter, "**receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**" (James 2:21-22)
 - iv. In the rest of the letter James unfolds what it looks like to be a doer and not a hearer only of the Word, in others words that believers would put their money where their mouth is.
2. Our readings begin in chapter 2 where James talks about the first two of his statements about being a doer of the Word.
 - a. He begins by talking about divisions, something near and dear to our hearts as we've seemingly talked about nothing else in our society than divisions recently
 - i. He says, "**My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"** (Jas 2:1-4)
 - ii. James is pointing out one of the oldest distinctions in the world – money and the all-too-prevalent belief that those who have it are more worthy than those who don't.
 - iii. But nobody is more worthy than any other as God says in Genesis 9 after the flood, "**Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.**" (Gen 9:6)
 - iv. So, we are intrinsically people are equal because we have been made in God's image and we should accord each other respect.
 - b. But more fundamentally for Christians is the realization that we treat each as God in Christ has treated us.
 - i. Regardless of who we are in this world: rich, poor, privileged, or not, regardless of race we are all condemned in our sin, without excuse.

- ii. Yet in our need God did not turn His back on us but sent His Son to bear the sin of the whole world, everyone alike, so that anyone who believes in Him is forgiven and will live forever.
 - iii. That is the beginning of the basis of radical Christian equality that none is more deserving than another because we are all equally condemned as Paul tells us in Romans, **“For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”** (Rom 11:32)
 - iv. Therefore, we are all equally saved by God’s grace alone as Paul says in Galatians, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Gal 3:28)
3. With that as a basis we don’t regard anyone according to earthly models of in or out, worthy or unworthy, rich or poor but as equally wretched saved only by grace.
- a. And having that knowledge means that we live out our salvation in the same loving service as Christ did for us without distinction.
 - i. As He says, **“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”** (Jas 2:14)
 - ii. If we love and accept each other as Christ loved us than we would do for each another what Christ did for us – serve.
 - iii. To merely talk about love does nothing to help those in need as James says, **“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”** (Jas 2:15-16)
 - b. A living faith puts its money where its mouth is and does something
 - i. Just as Christ didn’t just talk about salvation but gave His life up for us so our faith compels us to act as James says, **“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”** (Jas 2:17-18)
 - ii. “Faith” that doesn’t result in action is merely intellectual assent to the idea of Christianity
 - c. James isn’t talking about salvation by works, he’s talking about what saving faith looks like in the world – it results in action
 - i. This is the same thing Paul also says in Galatians, **“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith *working* through love (charity in Greek).”** (Gal 5:6)
 - ii. John says the same thing in his first epistle, **“But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”** (1Jn 3:17-18)

d. Dearly beloved our Lord has called us to a living and active faith, He promises through the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of His Word to radically transform our hearts and minds to become Christ-like. Pray that through the Holy Spirit He would enable and empower you to put your money where your mouth is and become doers of the Word and not hearers only!