24th Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1967

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. James 2: 17, 26 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

THE LIVING DEAD!

Faith without works is dead, said St. James. He meant exactly what he said: If the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead ... faith divorced from deeds is as lifeless as a corpse ... faith without action is as dead as a body without a soul. This Word of God rings a bell. Everyone knows exactly what it means. If you profess the Christian faith, and your faith produc no action to correspond with your profession, you might as well forget about it. That faith of yours is useless and dead. It is no faith at all.

St. James was talking about the LIVING DEATH which characterizes so much religion in our world - beautiful in its pretensions but actually worthless becau it is dead as a doornail.... If it is any comfort to us today, the apostles of ou Lord Jesus Christ had to contend with this LIVING DEATH in their own day in their own congregations. They had to deal with people who claimed to be Christians, frequently passing judgment upon the religion of others but with no real religion of their own. They had no faith worthy of the name, though they thought of themselves as the cream of the crop. To such people St. James had a blunt word: WHAT DOES IT PROFIT, MY BRETHREN, IF A MAN SAYS HE HAS FAITH BUT HAS NOT WORKS? CAN HIS FAITH SAVE HIM? IF A BROTHER OR SISTER IS ILL-CLAD AND IN LACK OF 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 DOES IT PROFIT? SO FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD. BUT SOMEONE WILL SAY, 'YOU HAVE FAITH AND I HAVE WORKS SHOW ME YOUR FAITH APART FROM YOUR WORKS, AND I BY MY WORKS WILL SHOW YOU MY FAITH YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE; YOU DO WELL. EVEN THE DEMONS BELIEVE - AND SHUDDER. DO YOU WANT TO BE SHOWN, YOU FOOLISH FELLOW, THAT FAITH APART FROM WORKS IS BARREN WAS NOT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER JUSTIFIED BY WORKS, WHEN HE OFFERED HIS SON ISAAC UPON THAT ALTAR? YOU SEE THAT FAITH WAS ACTIVE ALONG WITH HIS WORKS, AND FAITH WAS COMPLETED BY WORKS, AND THE SCRIPTURE WAS FULFILLED WHICH SAYS, 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS'; AND HE WAS CALLED THE FRIEND OF GOD. YOU SEE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY WORKS AND NOT BY FAITH ALONE. AND IN THE

SAME WAY WAS NOT ALSO RAHAB THE HARLOT JUSTIFIED BY WORKS WHEN SHE RECEIVED THE MESSENGERS AND SENT THEM OUT ANOTHER WAY? FOR AS THE BODY APART FROM THE SPIRIT DEAD, SO FAITH APART FROM WORKS IS DEAD.

The whole point is that God expects practical results from genuine faith - real deeds of love and charity, not just good intentions. The problem is as old as the hills and as modern as tomorrow's newspaper. Too many people are satisfie with an expression of faithfulness to God, thinking that is enough. It is NOT enough, said St. James. And he lashes out against all those fine people who clai to believe in God but act like the devil. He also has something to say to all those fine people who are constantly telling us that what is needed is deeds, not creeds - who imagine that the answer to a dead faith is to forget about faith and to emphasize works.

James was not a do-gooder. His answer to dead formalism with in the church was not to promote the good life as if it could exist without faith in Christ. Faith was important to him - faith that would show itself in life. James had little patience with those who say, It does not make any difference what you believe; it what you do that counts. He also had no patience with those who say, It doesn't make any difference what you do; it's what you believe that counts. Faith, no matter how correctly stated, is not faith at all unless it produces. Unless faitl produces, it is as dead as a body without a soul... St. James talks to both the do-gooders and the do-nothings: NOW WHAT USE IS IT, MY BROTHERS, FOR A MAN TO SAY HE HAS FAITH IF HIS ACTIONS DO NOT CORRESPOND WITH IT? CAN THAT SORT OF FAITH SAVE ANYONE'S SOUL? IF A FELLOW MAN OR WOMAN HAS NO CLOTHES TO WEAR OR NO FOOD TC EAT, AND ONE OF YOU SAY, 'GOOD LUCK TO YOU. I HOPE YOU WILL KEEP WARM AND FIND ENOUGH TO EAT,' AND YET GIVE THEM NOTHING TO MEET THEIR PHYSICAL NEEDS, WHAT ON EARTH IS THE GOOD OF THAT? BUT THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT A BARE FAITH WITHOUT A CORRESPONDING LIFE IS LIKE - USELESS AND DEAD. IF WE ONLY HAVE 'FAITH', A MAN COULD EASILY CHALLENGE US BY SAYING, 'YOU SAY THAT YOU HAVE FAITH AND I HAVE MERELY GOOD ACTIONS.' WELL, ALL YOU CAN DO IS TO SHOW ME A FAITH WITHOUT CORRESPONDING ACTIONS BUT I CAN SHOW YOU BY MY ACTIONS THAT I HAVE FAITH AS WELL.

Wherever faith is genuine, the two go together: FAITH and ACTION. What God has joined together cannot be put asunder. God gives faith as a gift, but He does not expect it to stand alone. No man can say, God has given me the gift of faith, and He has given you the gift of a pious life. That's just a clever bit c sophistry to escape God's judgment. James will have none of it. FAITH WITHOUT ACTION, he said, IS AS DEAD AS A BODY WITHOUT A SOUL. Either you have faith, or you don't. If you have faith, you will go into action. In James' language, fait is important, but it has to mean more than words. WHAT USE IS IT, MY BROTHERS, FOR A MAN TO SAY HE HAS FAITH WHEN HE DOES NOTHING TO SHOW IT? CAN THAT FAITH SA HIM? Obviously, faith is more than using a certain set of words. It is more tha acknowledging certain things to be true. It is more than just saying you believe in God. There is more to faith than church membership, or even sincerity in wha you say you believe. Sincerity does not mean much, unless faith produces action.

Faith without action is LIVING DEATH. Action without faith is just as dead, because it is bound to arise from motives that are less than pure, with a lot of selfishness and self-interest mixed in. Faith is trust in God, producing a chang of heart and mind which results in honest-to-goodness ACTION - life that corresponds with the faith that produces it.

St. Paul often spoke about the process by which faith produces life worthy o that faith. He talked about standing beneath the Cross of Christ and understandi the whole misdirection of his life before he met Christ. He talked about being crucified with Christ and, as a result, coming alive: I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST, NEVERTHELESS, I LIVE; YET NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME. AND THE LIFE WHICH I NO LIFE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME.

The God whom St. Paul and St. James knew and served is a God of action. He gave His Son to be the Savior of the world. In Christ, He gives forgiveness to all men. He loves. He acts on our behalf. He suffers in our place. He dies tha we might have life. And He gives faith to accept this forgiveness and this life from His gracious Hand. He gives, and He expects action.

Faith works. It was designed to work. It makes ordinary people like yours sympathetic to other people. God is sympathetic to you in Christ. Faith never permits the closing of these doors. People are inclined to close doors unless th get something in return. Faith opens the door, and keeps it open, even though nothing is expected in return. This is faith as St. James talked about it - fait that acts. THINK OF ABRAHAM, OUR ANCESTOR, said the apostle. WASN'T IT HIS ACTI WHICH REALLY JUSTIFIED HIM IN GOD'S SIGHT WHEN HIS FAITH LED HIM TO OFFER HIS SON ISAAC ON THE ALTAR? CAN'T YOU SEE THAT HIS FAITH AND HIS ACTIONS WERE, SO TO SPEAK, PARTNERS - THAT HIS FAITH WAS IMPLEMENTED BY HIS DEEDS? THIS IS WHAT THE SCRIPTURES MEAN WHEN THEY SAY, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED UNT HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS'; AND HE WAS CALLED THE FRIEND OF GOD. MAN IS JUSTIFIED BE FORE GOD BY WHAT HE DOES AS WELL AS BY WHAT HE BELIEVES. RAHAB, WHO WAS A PROSTI TUTE AND A FOREIGNER, HAS BEEN QUOTED AS AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH. IT WAS HER ACTION THAT PLEASED GOD, WHEN SHE WELCOMED JOSHUA'S RECONNOITERING PARTY AND SENT THEM SAFELY BACK BY A DIFFERENT ROUTE. YES, FAITH WITHOUT ACTION IS AS DEAD AS A BODY WITHOUT A SOUL.

Elton Trueblood tells of a prominent physicist who sensed that there must be a deeper dimension to life than he could discover in the laboratory. He thought, perhaps, he could find what he was looking for in church. Each Sunday he left disappointed: It seemed to him that these people were merely going through the motions, and they did not mean what they said; that the Gospel was an old record worn smooth with much playing. With the world on the very brink of a new hell, these people had no sense of urgency or of power.

Real faith works with urgency and power. You cannot say lackadaisically, GOOD LUCK TO YOU, I'LL SEE YOU ON ANOTHER DAY. That is not faith - it is a LIVING DEATH. It is not enough for church bodies, therefore, to issue pronouncements or for congregations to erect new church buildings. Faith and worship cannot be confined to buildings. Faith has to go to work in the world. Faith calls for honest service - the finest worship any faithful Christian can ever offer. In factories and shops - in offices and on farms - in political parties and in govern

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ment agencies - in countless homes, in the relationship of husbands and wives, parents and children - in press, radio, and television - and in relationships between people across the world — FAITH WORKS, because that is what it was designed to do.

God is a God of the living and not of the dead. He calls each of us to a living faith... Soul and body make a living person — faith and works belong together if you are going to be spiritually alive. They produce the red-blooded Christian. God has promised it: BY FAITH IN CHRIST YOU WILL LIVE. So You don't hav to be a lifeless corpse. You can be alive through faith in Christ - faith that works.

The story is told of a ham radio operator who had just finished setting up his equipment. His neighbors noticed the new antenna and already began to complain that their radio and TV reception was affected. He told one of his friends It's not even connected up yet. But my neighbors have been complaining about TV and radio interference and blaming my broadcasting, even though I haven't sent a word. We so easily identify equipment with action. God gives the equipment — FAITH. He expects us to use it - to be men and women who are connected up to Hi to use the equipment. START SENDING! Amen.