

Faith *and* Works: Faith *or* Works? No, Faith *that* works!

James 2 v 14-26

Luke 10 v25-37

I've brought something very special with me to church this morning. It's my faith. But I don't want to get it out and show it around because I might lose it or get it dirty: it might be challenged or compromised. It's too precious to me to share with just anyone. Like the priest and the Levite in the gospel reading - they had great faith but it was too important to them to risk putting it into practice by helping out the wounded traveller. It was too precious to risk turning into works. On the other hand, the Samaritan did put his faith into practice and he got into a right mess for doing so. His faith in action cost him time and money and inconvenience. His faith led him into a *right mess*.

Let's try to illustrate what this means. Imagine some pots each containing separately peanut butter, sugar and egg – these represent my faith and my works. They are separate, in nice compartments and not contaminated. But actually, I don't think that's what a living faith is all about and I certainly don't think that what James believed either. Now use the contents of the pots to illustrate what happens when you let your faith get messy and mixed up with works. James says a living faith *must be mixed up* with works. He says if faith has no works then it is dead. Faith is a living thing and we can't choose between faith *or* works but we have to have a faith *that* works.

And this will get messy because our faith needs to be **seen** in the everyday; the mundane; the very, very ordinary. Our faith must be inseparable from our works: our works must be inseparable from our faith. Now look at the things we've mixed together. Can you pick out what was works and what was faith? No! It's all one glorious whole; considerably messier than when they were all in their nice, separate pots but the end result is something more amazing than the individual, separate parts. (In this case we need to apply a little heat for 10min...)

An amazing thing happens when we have a living faith: we live the faith daily. That might be in quiet prayer or meditation; in works of love and service; in the fight for justice; in acts of kindness, hospitality or generosity. But we have to have a *faith that works*.

The Christian life in the streets, homes, offices, school and shops around you *is* the gospel of Christ. *Your* Christian life in the streets, homes, offices, schools and shops is the gospel of Christ because we don't choose faith or works: we have a *faith that works*.

(Based on a reading in Daily Bread)