

# ***Faith Works***

September 19, 2021

**Overarching Theme:** In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1<sup>st</sup> Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

**James**

While discussing those New Testament writings he regarded as central to the gospel, Martin Luther dismissed the Letter of James as "an epistle of straw". For John Wesley, however, this small letter was central for Christian faith and life. In his journal, he described James as a remedy against the general temptation of leaving off good works in order to increase faith. Elsewhere, Wesley observed that, when James wrote his letter, "That grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works, was spread far and wider; filling the Church with a 'wisdom from beneath' which was 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' and which gave rise, to only to rash judging and evil speaking, but to 'envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work'"

The Letter of James has a heightened emphasis on Christian identity borne out of concern with the hardships of life as pilgrims in a foreign land. James refers to his audience as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion". "Twelve tribes" calls to mind the end-time restoration of the scattered people of Israel, whereas "Dispersion" suggests experiences of alienation and homelessness. The result is an unsettled status in the world. As the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* puts it, "Christians . . . live in their respective countries, but only as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign territory is a homeland for them, every homeland foreign territory". We should not be surprised, then, that James's instruction centers on problems related to the

status of believers in the world, the pressures and challenges of living in exile, and the identity of God's people.

--from the Wesley Study Bible, pg1499

### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

James 2:14-19

**14** What good is it, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, **16** 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? **17** So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

**18** 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.

### **This Week**

James's passionate insistence in this section that faith must be translated into practice seems like the most obvious good sense. We might wonder why it needs saying. Yet the evidence is overwhelming that precisely this reminder above all needs to be made repeatedly and urgently. There is something deep inside humans that leads them to presume that knowing the right truth or holding the right position is enough to make them righteous. The ancient Greco-Roman philosophers knew this. The *Discourses* of Epictetus are filled with remonstrances against students of philosophy who can quote their textbooks concerning self-control and reasonableness, yet whose lives exemplify neither. Indeed, even among philosophers, the gap between profession and performance was often so prominent as to encourage the popular stereotype of the daytime philosopher, dignified and sober, who was also the nighttime carouser, lewd and drunk. The earliest Christian movement was not free from this same tendency, as the moral exhortations in Paul's letters make plain.

There is certainly not a congregation in the world today that would declare James 2:14-18 wrong. All Christians would agree that faith needs to be demonstrated in action. The issue is precisely whether that theoretical agreement is met in congregations with corresponding attention to action, and, furthermore, what sort of action the community considers to be a priority.

Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol XII, pp. 199-200

### **Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:**

1. Faith Works weekend is an opportunity for us all to live out our faith; a time for others to see our faith through our works. How was your faith seen through the works you did this weekend? If you were unable to serve this weekend, how has your faith been demonstrated through your actions recently?
2. If someone were to observe you on a random day, apart from an intentional time of missional outreach, would your faith be obvious?
3. How do you respond to those who can talk a good game of faith, but who fail to live their faith?

### **Activity for the Life of a Disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Take time each day to journal in the "*Morning by Morning*" gratitude resource.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week (James 2:18b):  
*I by my works will show you my faith.*