

still waters

home church studies

Psalm 125

[Worship]

1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore. 3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong. 4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts. 5 But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel!

Consider:

[Words]

Do not let class distinction enter into your faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord (James 2:1). The lectionary readings this week contain a litany of directions and leave us in no doubt about our behavior toward the poor and oppressed. The selection of Proverbs concludes with the command, "Do not despoil the weak...and do not oppress the poor...for the Lord God takes up their cause and [rather more uncomfortably] extorts the life of their extortioners" (Proverbs 22:22-23). The psalm, one which reflects people's trust in time of suffering, also calls on God to "do good to those who are good....But the crooked, the twisted, turn them away with evildoers" (Psalm 125:4-5).

The letter of James is uncompromising on behalf of the poor. He pictures a courtroom dialogue between the wealthy and the poor and exposes the tendency of us all to judge by appearances, offering preference to the well-dressed. However, poverty is not only measured by appearance. There is the more insidious and deeply ingrained impact of culture, which leads even the most enlightened to the borders of sin.

Jesus is accosted and addressed by a Gentile woman, a culturally unacceptable thing to do. Reacting like any Jewish male, Jesus uses words that shock us: "It is not fair," he says, "to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs" (Mark 7:27). Having gotten further than most others would—a reply from a Jewish man—the woman pushes her luck by responding, "But little dogs...eat the scraps from the children." Jesus receives a riposte that he cannot gainsay.

The woman, who has been discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, and class, "teaches" Jesus something about inclusivity in God's order. Her persuasiveness in argument forced him to recognize his privileged position and to re-evaluate it. This is an example of what the writer to the Hebrews meant when he said of Jesus that he "learned his obedience, son though he was, through his sufferings" (Hebrews 5:8). We too are invited to recognize our privilege, to face our prejudice, to observe and change our exclusiveness into inclusiveness.



Reflection and Action

What privileges do you have in your life? List some examples. Recall those who do not share your privileges. Make another list. How will you seek to obey James' instruction not to let class (or any other) distinctions enter into your faith in Jesus Christ?

[Scripture]

James 2. 11-17

11 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. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, 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.