

**SERMON**  
**By: Gail Fricker**

***“No Favourite’s Here!”***

**September 16, 2018**

**James 2:1-10, 14-17**

A few weeks ago, after dropping our son off at camp, my husband and I decided to go on a bit of a mystery tour. We turned off the GPS, and using the road map, we headed for a place that looked like it might be interesting. The map indicated that there was a water hydro dam nearby, there seemed to be a body of water – and we thought perhaps there might be a nice place for us to stop and get something to eat. We knew nothing about the place. As we drove closer, the paved roadway soon turned into a gravel road, which became more and more narrow. Then we noticed a bit of a garbage dump beside the road on our left, and as we drove on, we found ourselves in a very run down and tiered looking trailer park. There was a group of grubby looking children playing on some rusty and broken play equipment; a pile of discarded old tyres; some shirtless and tattooed men were sitting around smoking, leaning against their trucks. And, I have to tell you, – I passed judgement! My immediate reaction was that this was not the sort of place that I wanted to get out of the car, and it certainly was not where I wanted to stop for lunch! In fact, I made sure that the windows were up, and the door were locked as we turned the car around to leave the place. But, as we left, I remember the image of a small child, he could not have been more than 4 years old, he was just partially clothed, and he was peering at us through the broken window pane of a run-down shack looking building. His big wide eyes looked hopeless and helpless.

But, did I see the eyes of Christ in this child, or in any of the people in this place? NO. My only thought was to get out of there. I was guilty of discriminating and passing judgement. I was guilty of favoritism.

Our scripture today clearly tells us that favoritism is a sin. James writes:

*“But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.” (v9)*

You see favoritism isn’t new.

In James letter to the Jewish believers, he gives an example of showing favoritism. He talks about two guests coming to church on the Sabbath. A modern day translation might be that one drives up in a new Mercedes, is wearing a Rolex, has a sparkling gold ring on their finger, and dressed in a designer outfit. And right behind them is someone that pulls up in a beat up KIA, looking dishevelled, wearing a mismatch of cheap clothes that are now stained with a hole in the knee.

And James warns his readers, that if they treat the two people differently in any way, then they are showing favoritism. They are not living out what we know as ‘the golden rule’ – James calls it the:

*“royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” (v8)*

Favoritism - Aren’t you glad that we don’t have that problem in churches today?

We all know that judging people is bad. Our culture has laws that legislate against hate crimes and rules on equality. So, favoritism is definitely not a problem....right?

I mean we all read how the government policies of our US neighbours have caused a surge in hate crimes – but here in Canada? Aren't we the peaceful and compassionate nation? Don't we welcome everyone into our cultural mosaic that makes us Canada?

Wrong. My friends, a quick google search on hate crimes shows that Canadian hate crimes have grown, and have become more violent for the last three straight years. A report in Canada's National Observer last year read:

*"Statistics Canada said that attacks against a person's sexual orientation, as well as people identified as South Asian, Arab or West Asian, East or Southeast Asian ethnicities, and as Jewish, all saw increases."* (Canada's National Observer, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017.)

When James is writing to the Jewish believers, he is warning them not just against favoritism between the rich and the poor; many theologians believe that James was referring to favoritism between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. Favoritism between cultures, traditions, ways of living – just like our statistics in Canada.

But we know this right? I mean we don't have favoritism here at church?

As far as I know, we wouldn't ask anyone that came into this church to leave or change seats. We wouldn't make them stand at the side because of what they wore? Or ask them to sit in the balcony. I think that generally we do our best to welcome all our guest equally.

So how are we guilty of favoritism?

Unfortunately, we may not be as welcoming and fair and open as James is suggesting. We might have fooled ourselves into thinking that we are welcoming to our guests because we don't actually have a lot of Guests. It is easy to think we don't show favoritism or prejudice, when only people like us show up.

What if we have a visitor that showed up at church, drunk?

What if they had their bodies covered in body art?

What if they look more desperate for a meal than for worship?

What if they smell funny?

And in a small town like Ayr, what if we already know their history, their reputation or that they obviously just want something?

We are commanded to treat every person, and every neighbor, just as we want to be treated, otherwise we are breaking God's royal law. And to do this, we have to work at living differently, thinking differently, and treating outsiders the same.

Theologian and best selling author Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote a book called *'Accidental Saints, Finding God in all the wrong people'*. She is an ordained minister that is tattooed, angry and often uses profanity, but she has answered God call to serve people in the margins, and she reminds us that God keeps showing up in the least likely of people—a church-loving agnostic, a drag queen, a gun-toting member of the NRA. – or for me, perhaps it was as a small child that peered out the window of the broken down shack.

We are commanded to treat everyone equally. Not those that are just like us. Nadia Bolz Weber asks us, just like James told his readers: ‘what if that person you’ve been trying to avoid is your best shot at sharing God’s grace today?’

Bolt-Weber suggests that the decline in church attendance is an indication that Christians all over the country are failing to do the work of the church. We are failing to reach out to others and share God’s grace. We are guilty of having the same flaws as the majority of our culture. The same flaws as the early Jewish believers. We say one thing on the outside - here at church we sing songs about inclusion and sisterly love, but we think and decide something else on the inside, in the privacy of our homes and lives.

We are guilty of favoritism.

I know that I was, as I drove through that trailer park.

We actually need those laws that legislate hate crimes and discrimination to keep our favoritism within limits. We are guilty of saying one thing but acting in a different way.

And yet James warns his readers in verse 17:

*“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

Is our faith dead? It seems that we are open and welcoming to people like us, but what about the other people that God may choose to send to us in our lives? Do we go out of our way to talk to them about our faith and share God’s grace with them, or do we just talk to our favorites?

I want to challenge you to take on a new task this coming week- to put your faith into action.

I want you to pray that God will point out to you a person that you would normally shy away from – someone you don’t usually talk to. Then I want us to lovingly DO something, overtly, openly, and outwardly for them. Reach out and share God’s grace with them. If you don’t know what their need is, ask God what you can do? Even if it is just that you intentionally silently pray for them each day.

I know that this will not be an easy task, but I also know that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will give each of the courage to do this – if we ask!

Let us not forget that Jesus taught us how to do this by example. Jesus sat, talked and ate with tax collectors, prostitutes, political extremists, the socially disenfranchised, the poor and lame. He went out of his way to show us how we need to reach out to others, and not just to our favorites.

And when we all do this, here’s what I think will happen.

I believe we will find ourselves face-to-face with someone we may have little in common with, but who God loves.

I believe we will be able to discover in them a place where we can meet them, and a way that we can demonstrate God’s compassion for them.

And I believe that this, in turn, will change our hearts. When we are empowered to share God’s love and grace with others, we become more like God intends us to be. Living by Christ’s example. And, as a Community of Faith here at Knox, we will be living out Christ’s mission in our community.

Amen.