

I don't know if we shall be resurrecting our 'This time tomorrow' talks, but I used to enjoy listening to fellow Christians telling us what they would be doing from Monday to Saturday. Christianity is not a Sunday only activity.

James chapter 5 certainly indicates that faith is to be lived in every moment of every day and touches each and every aspect of our lives. If we are in trouble we are to pray; if we are happy we are to sing songs of praise; if we are ill we are to seek prayer and the anointing with oil. Oil was actually a form of medication in Jesus' time, and it was also an outward sign of God's healing through prayer offered in faith. On this point I look forward to when we can offer anointing again at communion time. It is something that I for one miss. However I do believe that God is still responding to our prayers even if we haven't been able to offer that personal one to one prayer and anointing. The parish prayer app has certainly demonstrated that God has been kept rather busy on our account in recent times.

The passage from James also says that if we have sinned we are to confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness. To know one's sin and subsequently to receive God's forgiveness is in itself a huge healing for our souls. Repentance and forgiveness is so important that we also have the responsibility of leading others into the way of truth. We should desire the salvation of other people as well as for ourselves. Maybe it isn't a case of saying 'don't do this' or 'don't do that', but more a case of speaking out the gospel message to those who will listen.

The reading from James touches every area of our lives, but it is interesting that James also cites the effect of prayer on the world of nature too. Elijah was so connected with God that he is used as an example of someone whose prayer affected rainfall. I have wondered if some of you prayed about the weather when we had our Parish barbecue at the Church of the Good Shepherd! It was certainly a rain free evening.

God is in the job of helping us become the best we can be in every aspect of our lives, and this is evident in our Gospel reading from Mark chapter 9 as well. It is vitally important that we take care of our own actions as Christians. If we fail in our own allegiance to Jesus and the gospel then, like salt that loses its saltiness, we will be of no use to the world around us.

Which denomination we belong to is of no concern, just so long as we focus on Christ and the good news of being put right before God through Him. John was quite indignant that someone else was driving out demons in Jesus' name. He felt it was the preserve of himself and the other disciples, and as a result he gets a telling off from Jesus. Whoever is not against Christ is for Him. To hinder the work of Christ carries a huge penalty. Anyone who follows Christ must be encouraged and supported. The development of faith is so important, especially for those who are new to the faith, and no Christian is better than another.

I am reminded of the joke about a chap who went to heaven and was being shown round by St. Peter. St Peter said "Over there we have the Methodists, and the Baptists are over here. Then in that corner we have the Anglicans, but now be very quiet as we pass the Catholics, because they think they are the only ones here!" As an ex convent school pupil that amused me, but of course you could use any denomination as the butt of the joke, even us Anglicans! Christianity may be exclusive, but the different brands certainly aren't.

Now we come to some very serious stuff in Mark's Gospel – words that really shouldn't be taken literally, as we are told to amputate our hands and feet, and pluck out our eyes, if any of those body parts cause us to stumble. Those suggestions may please Islamists, but it is certainly not the way of Christ, who uses such exaggeration, not in a literal sense, but to make the point that drastic action – spiritual surgery if you like – is necessary to avoid going down sinful paths. Temptation, such as a lustful eye, must not lead us into sin. The only way out is to rely on God's help. Sin must be recognised for what it is and dealt with through repentance and claiming Christ's forgiveness. We are to encourage each other to be as salt in the world and to be at peace with one another.

Our first reading spoke of receiving Christ's healing in various ways – claiming the power of God's kingdom, but the first disciples still suffered and died for their faith. It actually isn't easy to be a disciple of Christ. We are to be in the world but not of it. There is no distinction if we allow ourselves to be absorbed by the standards of the culture around us. It is our task to be as salt to the world. Otherwise we are of no use. It is serious stuff. Our standards should reflect the purity of Christ, even if we are vilified for it. It is a high calling and a difficult one. But when we go astray, which we will, there is always repentance and Christ's forgiveness for every day of the week, not just on Sundays. That is the Good News. Thanks be to God.