

Connecting faith and daily life

Part of the family

Richard Greatrex *reflects on* James 2:1-10 [11-13] 14-17 and Mark 7:24-end

One of the Bible's major themes courses through all of today's readings, regarding the treatment by the rest of society of those deemed poor, sick, outcast and alien. Scripture resounds with the belief that God stands in solidarity with those who are broken, lost and lonely, yet the author of the letter of James still needs to upbraid fellow Christians for their failure to put this into practice. Their faith is lacking if it does not lead them to follow God's way, to act mercifully.

Turning to the Gospel it initially looks as if Jesus may have fallen into the same mindset. Travelling into Gentile territory for a break from demanding Galilean crowds, he finds his popularity has preceded him. When a Syrophenician woman begs him to help her possessed daughter, he tartly reminds her that his mission is firstly to Israel. But when her response uses his own language against him, Jesus graciously admits the validity of her argument. Declaring her daughter healed, he treats this Gentile woman as his equal, enacting God's preference for those who are marginalised. Both he and the woman need to cross boundaries created by religion, ethnicity and gender, to do what is right.

Today we are called to overcome many of those self-same barriers to keep building Church as a holy kingdom where all are welcome as equal members of God's family. ☺

God of mercy, teach us to see you in each other; embolden us to tear down barriers which create misunderstanding, distrust and despair. Give us grace to admit our mistakes and courage to embrace all as equal in your sight. Amen.

St Paul

Part III

by Becky Mynett

Becky continues her series about the life and work of St Paul.

The New Testament contains thirteen letters traditionally thought to have been written by Paul. Biblical scholars agree that he definitely wrote seven of them. These are the earliest surviving Christian scriptures and pre-date the Gospels. The first, 1 Thessalonians, was probably written in around AD 50 and the last, Romans, about eight years

later. Between these, Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, Corinth and Philippi, and to Philemon.

As for the rest, scholars disagree whether they were written by Paul or later followers, although the vast majority think it unlikely he wrote the letters to Timothy and Titus. It is now thought they were written after his death in around AD 64, and the same goes for Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians and Colossians.

It was common for letters to be written in the name of a respected teacher, so we should not think of them as forgeries. And of course, although they may not have been written by Paul, they are still valuable early Christian documents. ☺



Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Whatever the weather the year moves on and I start assessing the flock of rare breed sheep. The lambs are almost ready to leave their mothers and move to live in the next field with the old ewes, who will keep them close and break up the inevitable

scrapping for dominance. The breeding ewes now have a chance to regain their condition after feeding their lambs for five months and I can assess who should be in the breeding flock when the new ram arrives.

My judgement has to be a tender one. I'm looking to bring out the best traits so the breed flourishes. It's that flourishing that I learn from the God in the creation stories of Genesis. "Behold it was good" is the refrain in that scripture and as I stand in the field watching sheep, I can say too, "behold it is good". ☺

“ Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

Romans 14:19