

***A sermon preached by
Emma Hodge at
St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst on
Sunday 20th March 2022
as part of a sermon series "What it means to be a Christian?"***

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Today, is the third in our Lenten sermon series of ***"What it means to be a Christian?"*** We started by considering the parable of the rich ruler, and last week, whether we need to attend church to be a Christian; while today's theme is "Living it out" and I'm going to start by asking you a question, ***How would you say you live out your faith as a Christian?***

OK don't panic, I'm not going to ask you to comment on this, but one thing to reflect on is that being a Christian is about being who we are, it affects every aspect of our lives. It's not constrained to just what we do for the church, or good works, instead it is about every aspect of our daily lives. *So if you thought this sermon was about encouraging you to volunteer for different roles in church, then you are going to be disappointed! Just speak to me, Catherine or John afterwards!*

If we look at our New Testament reading from the letter of James it clearly states that just having faith, just being a Christian, is not enough, we need to put it into practice. This is a common theme in the New Testament, for example in Galatians 2 verse 20 we are told that by being a Christian, we live only because Christ lives in us and so because Christ lives in us, we do his work in all areas of our lives.

Our gospel reading expands on this when we are encouraged to be "salt" and "light" in the world. Salt has a numerous uses, not only being used to flavour food, but also to preserve food as well as being used for cleaning purposes. In the Old Testament, it was part of the offerings¹ that the Jewish people were instructed to offer at the temple. Jesus instructions are that we are the "Salt of the earth". If we apply this analogy to our lives, as salt is common, every day item, that is essential for so many areas of our life, then we, as Christians, need to ensure that we show our faith in everyday ways.

So how do we put our faith into action?

For me, the majority of my time, is not spent doing good works, or volunteering for the church, it is instead spent working. I work in the clinical research industry and manage a team of 11 people. I live out my faith at work and I am very blessed as the company I work for encourages us to bring all aspects of ourselves to work, they realise and acknowledge that we have many different aspects to our lives, and that we need to manage each one of them, and work is just one of the aspects of our lives.

¹ Lev 2:13 & Ezek 43:24 & Ezra 6:9

I feel that God has called me to the company I work for, I've been with them for about three years, after prayer I felt he was calling me to join them, when there were challenges at work, for example the threat of redundancy, through prayer I feel God has confirmed that I am where God wants me. I don't know what God has in store for me; how he wants to use me at work, but I am willing to let Him use me for His work at my work, all I have to do is to follow Him.

So how do I live out my faith at work?

Firstly by praying, yes I pray for my team, they are a multi-faith, multi-racial, multi-cultural team of people of all ages, from those just out of university, to parents of those who are at university and everyone in between. And like any group of people their lives are not always smooth, they have challenges, some at work, some more personal. Some of them know that I am a Christian and active in my church, others don't, but whatever issues they are facing, I pray about it, I don't always tell them I'm praying for them, I just hold them before God in prayer.

I also pray for situations at work, working for a large multi-national company, negotiating contracts with hospitals for clinical research is challenging and full of frustrations such as changes to study design. The companies who developed the drug always want studies at the hospitals they have selected to start quickly and as such often put pressure on us to get this done, and in the company I work for, there are different people involved in helping to run the study for the pharmaceutical company and then we have the hospitals, who have their own issues and timescales and workload which mean they have different priorities from the pharma companies! This means we have to balance and work with a lot of different people all with different personalities and stress can sometimes be shown so yes prayer for these situations is definitely required and yes, sometimes I fail to pray about different situations when in hindsight I should have done. I'm definitely not perfect and need to pray more. This is one way I live out my faith at work

Secondly, I live out my faith at work by service, we have internal and external customers, but also it is about serving my team. Yes, I'm their line manager, but I serve them, by representing them to upper management, by ensuring that they have opportunities to grow, to expand, to learn, by challenging unacceptable behaviour by others.

While work is demanding and a large part of my life, it's only part of my life, like everyone, shopping has to be done, and in this aspect as well my faith is demonstrated, by considering the environmental and social aspects of what I am purchasing.

This to me is one aspect of the passage from the Letter of James, that is easy to put into practice, when we consider the items we buy and not buy the cheapest, or the most convenient, but by considering if it is fair trade, if it is something that has a low environmental impact (including the use of charity shops), if the companies I am buying from are responsible and the product is made by companies who treat their workers fairly (by checking their modern slavery statements and countries where they are made).

By doing so, not only are we following the “green, ethical shopper culture” but we are following Jesus command to “love our neighbours as ourselves” if we care about the conditions the people producing the products we buy live in, how they are treated at work then we care for them and put our faith into action.

Caring about how they live, also means about caring for the environment, as the poor in our society can't afford the spiralling costs, the poor in our world, if crops fail don't have foodbanks and food share schemes to fall back on or access to free health care. The passage from James instructs us to care for those in need in our society, we are all children of God.

And I am the first to admit that while I try to buy fair trade, to buy local products and consider the environmental impact, sometimes it is easiest just to pick up the most convenient item as we are all busy,

These are just two areas of my life, where I try to put my faith into action. We are called, each and every day to live our lives as Christians, putting our faith into practice, not just in one area of our lives, but every aspect of our lives, each and every day, we can worship God, all the time by the way we live our lives; whether that is through big actions, or small quiet ones (I often reflect on something or pray while doing housework)

It is not always easy to put our faith into action each and every day. For many of us we have made a commitment to follow Jesus, often one of the more public commitments is at our confirmation service, and while it may have been many years ago, the promise is still true. We may have sung these words at either our confirmation service “O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end” is this still true for us that we confirm that we will follow and serve Jesus in all areas of our lives until the end?

At the start, I asked you a question ***How would you say you live out your faith as a Christian?***

Perhaps two other questions should be

- 1) What areas of your life are you good at living out your faith

And

- 2) What areas of your life do you need to work on to put your faith into practice

I certainly need to improve in different areas of my life to put my faith into action, and I am sure the same is true for most of you. As we think about it, we may like to reflect on this hymn written by Graham Kendrick;

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone him
Each others needs to prefer
For it is Christ we are serving

This is our God, The servant King
He calls us now to follow him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to, The servant king