

WEEKLY SERMON

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Having our hearts in the right place

Well, we've certainly become experts on washing our hands in the last couple of years, haven't we? That may well be one of the first things you notice in today's gospel reading as Jesus's followers are criticised for not washing their hands. Of course, this is not a public health story.

In today's readings we hear the addressing of the important priorities in life. Whilst cleanliness is not to be criticised and we've certainly become experts on that in the last 18 months Jesus is focused on making sure that to coin a good old British phrase our 'hearts are in the right place'. The religious leaders of the day were so focused on getting ritual right and on cleaning appropriately that they had forgotten that inner cleanliness was far more important for the sake of our souls than outer cleanliness was for our general well being. In other words, we could have the cleanest hands in Britain, but we need appropriate sanitizer for our souls too by being close to God and following the commandments that God gives us around appropriate behaviour.

In the Epistle of James this is picked up by a desire to live well and to 'be doers of the word'. Again, this is an injunction to be conscious of our responsibilities to one another and the way that we act towards one another as well as being aware of our legal obligations. Grace will always take us beyond the law. Whilst we are required to act in certain ways and we've certainly been good at applying restrictions in the last 18 months, we shouldn't just do that because we're told to but because it's for the common good of humanity.

Jesus and James enjoin us to follow the ways of God in order that our own selves may be right with God and that we don't put barriers in the way of others. As we open society again our calling as the Church is to help others encounter God not place so many barriers in their way that they must overcome our restrictions before finding a way to God through word and sacrament.

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HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES