

Epistle
James 2:14-17

14 What good is it,
my brothers and sisters,
if you say you have faith
but do not have works?

Can faith save you?

¹⁵If a brother or sister
is naked and lacks daily food,

¹⁶and one of you says to them,
‘Go in peace;
keep warm
and eat your fill’,

and yet
you do not supply
their bodily needs,
what is the good of that?

¹⁷So faith by itself,
if it has no works,
is dead.

Reading the Epistle This Week

Do you love, or hate James?
Luther hated it – wanted to omit it –
Too much ‘works righteousness’,
Rather than ‘saved by grace through faith’

The letter claims to be by ‘James’
Name of the brother of Jesus, died 62CE
Associated with Jerusalem church

More likely, the sophisticate Greek diction
Is not the work of a Galilean,
But Jewish interlocutors of Paul, later

Pistis or faith, more trust than belief
‘in’ or ‘of’ God in Christ
Says ‘pray as if it’s all up to God’

Erga or works
Doing more than ‘thoughts and prayers’,
‘Work as if it’s all up to you’

The writer invokes the naked and hungry
Concrete physical need
Met with vague good wishes for ‘peace’

Ophelos or profit, advantage,
Is to whom – which *adelphoi* ‘brothers’?
It’s a political text about equity

On this ‘World Food Sunday’
The UCC M&S material leaves the lectionary
Predictably appealing to this nugget

‘Cherry-picking’ favorite proof-texts is common
It’s persuasive use of scripture –
Is every verse in the bible of equal weight for you?

Binary, mutually exclusive options, faith or works?
How do you resolve the tension?

Prophet
Isaiah 55:1-13

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money
for that which is not bread,
and your labour
for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me,
and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves
in rich food.

³ Incline your ear,
and come to me;
listen,
so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD,
that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God,
for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Reading the Prophet this Week

Here's a whole chapter,
the last in 'second Isaiah'

If the original prophet Isaiah spoke
just before Babylon won

A second generation echoed him
in exile, in lament and hope

('Trito-Isaiah, 56-66,
assumes Persian rule and restoration)

Start with imperatives: come, buy!
Is this the voice of a marketplace vendor, or a ruler?
Teasing, cajoling, I favour the former.
(reminded of Proverbs 8 and 9)

What's the hope in exile?
David's deal is over – what's the new covenant on offer?
How will other nations react?
How will the people of Israel respond?

The second half is describing divine initiative –
Merciful, ineffable
Like rain and snow
Rather than personified judge or warrior

You shall go out with joy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unWnWSgoSt0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivfUKd6AFXw>

So what is the political program,
The evangelical agenda,
Voiced by Isaiah?

Wait till God waters you?
Or does it matter if you 'buy it'?
To you, or to the world, or to God?