

May these words be pleasing. Amen.

How well do you remember? Do you remember a game from primary school, perhaps from Sunday school, or scouts or guides: You would be shown a tray covered with a tea towel, which you mustn't touch. In this memory game the tea towel would be removed and when it was put back you had to see how many objects you could remember. Shall we give this a go? So we've got .....

James, the writer of our second reading, says, 'don't just know the bible, put it into practice.' James talks about people's memory and people's forgetfulness. 'The bible is of full stories and teaching and sound advice. Some people read it but then instantly forget. It's as if someone looks into a mirror, then goes away and instantly forgets what they have just seen.'

Mirrors.

The student said to the careers advisor: I think I want a job cleaning mirrors. It's just something I really could see myself doing.

I have three mirrors to describe this morning. The first came from this gentleman. (Who?). As you probably know Lewis Carroll went to Richmond School and on a Sunday attended church here at St Marys. His dad was an Anglican priest and the young Charles also knew Ripon Cathedral and the weird carvings under the choir stalls. It is thought that these strange carved creatures might have been an inspiration for the fantastic characters within Alice in Wonderland. In the second book, Through the Looking Glass, Alice re-enters Wonderland through a magic mirror. Now, I know I'm biased, but isn't it likely that Charles also knew the weird carvings and creatures under *our* ancient choir stalls before he saw the ones at Ripon – feel free to have a look at these after this morning's service.

The other two mirrors are from the bible. We've heard of the mirror of James: How strange would it be if one looked at a mirror only to go away and instantly forget what's just been seen. In the same way, it's possible to forget what's just been read in the bible, or what are about when we leave church.

A friend I know is a retired teacher who does more volunteer hours than anyone I know. He is not a religious man because, he says, when he was small his father would go each Sunday to church, he dressed for church, spoke well at church, an upstanding member of the church family. When his dad returned home all this would be forgotten; he would be physical with his family, especially his mother; he was cruel and unloving even to his nearest and dearest, especially to his nearest and dearest. The following Sunday he would be back in church and the pattern would repeat.

James says that we should not simply 'do church', not only 'know the bible', we should put it into practice in daily living; seven whole days, not one in seven.

The third and last mirror from the bible is the glass darkly of Paul. 'Though I now see through a glass darkly, then I shall know even as I am known.' Paul reminds us that we are made in the image of God – it's not always the clearest of images, but it's there; made by God, known by God, loved by God. It's there in me, it's there in you, in the rich, the poor, in the baby taking their first breath, in a person taking their last; made by God, known by God, loved by God.

It's easy, isn't it, to forget; we can forget this image of God. The God of love is always mindful of us, we are not always mindful of Him. So what can we do? We, members of this church family, whether here or at home choose routines to work against this forgetfulness; we remind ourselves of the presence and love of God: We come to church, we come together as a church family to remind each other, to show each other the image of God. Last week John encouraged us not to get out of the habit of doing church; some of the church mugs used at yesterday's Plant & Produce Sale had those familiar words 'keep hold of that which is good'. And we have choice *when* and *how*. Our church, this church, has a service every morning, a service every evening, and our services on Sunday, we choose to take part in the rhythm of life.

It's not been easy to retain our familiar church practices over this last year and a half. We've had other routines to learn or re-learn. When to wear a mask, where to wear a mask, and washing hands. It was judged necessary to teach us how to wash our hands! Do you remember? First it was 'wash your hands for as long as it takes to sing happy birthday'. But that wasn't good enough. Then it became 'as long as it takes to sing happy birthday twice'. What about this one: "Twinkle, twinkle little star. Look how clean my two hands are. With soap and water, wash and scrub. Got those germs off, rub-a-dub-dub. Twinkle, twinkle little star. Look how clean my two hands are!"

Have you felt frustration when you see others not following the rules? “If only everyone would follow the rules then we will beat Covid” and yet there seems to be so many different versions of what the rules are and what the rules should be.

Jesus made it clear that he was not against rules, he was not against commandments and laws. But he didn't buy into the idea that you can do anything you can beat anything you can achieve anything by making more and more rules for yourself and for others. The religious leaders made rules and then condemned Jesus and his friends when they did not follow them in the way that they prescribed.

We do ask people to wash their hands when they come into *this* house of God but we don't claim that this brings a person close to God. We *do* wish to do everything that we can to protect ourselves and others from disease but Jesus also warns us against spiritual dis-ease and damage. He gives us a daunting list: Fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. That's quite a list, and not a positive end to a sermon. So what about ending with the opposite list – things that we wish to show. When we remember God, together, as we practice our religion, together, what are the common values we wish to remember and show to each other?

Here are Paul's well known gifts of the spirit which we are not to forget:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.