



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

James 2: 14-17 'Faith without Works Is Dead'

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and 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?

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

The idea of "Faith and works" is central to the Epistle of James. If faith doesn't lead to action then it's a lifeless thing – most of us would agree with that. But confusion and misunderstandings have arisen over the centuries and some people have thought that good works are a way of earning God's love. And indeed in parts of the Old Testament there is a feeling that in order to get God's approval we have to win it, we have to collect brownie points along the way, as it were.

When we get to the New Testament, it's the opposite way round. It's *because* God loves us that we care for others. That care comes as a response to God's love, not to make him love us. 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). Jesus showed us that we don't have to win God's love, we don't have to earn it. God is love. Jesus proved to us by his incarnation, through his life and by his death on the cross that God loves us and that nothing can stop that love.

When I was ordained as a deacon I was one of the earliest women to be ordained in the Church of England. Some of the parishioners weren't at all sure about that and I overheard one asking another, "How long before we start getting recipes from the pulpit, do you reckon?" In fact, the only occasion that I brought cooking into a sermon was when I preached to this text, "We love because he first loved us".

My family were very fond of custard. It had to be smooth and creamy, not thin and lumpy, so it was important that I made it right. And the art of making good custard lies in using

milk that's absolutely boiling.

Then

when you pour the frothing liquid onto

the custard powder mixed with sugar in the jug, stirring all the time of course, the starch grains burst and you get a smooth creamy sauce with no trouble. No 'ifs' or 'buts', it just happens automatically. If the milk is boiling, the starch grains have no option but to burst and the custard thickens.

It's perhaps an odd analogy but it's like that with our faith. If our faith is real, God's outpouring love for us sparks in us an instinctive response. If you like, something within us bursts with love for God – it has to happen, it's spontaneous, not calculated. Quite unselfconsciously, without thinking about it, we find ourselves wanting to return God's love by caring for our neighbour.

And without our knowing it, that love for others with which we respond to God's amazing love for us, may be for someone else the way in which they come to know the love of God for the first time..

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your great, unconditional love for each one of us. May that love flow through us to others, as we respond to you, who first loved us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

