

The thrust of James' thesis is that the followers of Jesus were to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers." It is argued that James was offering a counter to those who were inclined to take Paul's teaching on faith to the extreme. In Romans 3: 28 Paul states "that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law."

Paul of course was arguing against the mindset common among the teachers of the law. They had developed a comprehensive, (one could say exhaustive) set of regulations prescribing what could be done and not done.

Paul was of the view that this emphasis on works and fulfilling the letter of the law had diverted attention from the reason the works were undertaken and the law observed. Their significance in Paul's view had been lost.

His assertion that "justification" was available through the gift that was Jesus and not as a result of observing the letter of the law became for some

an excuse to behave in ways that bore little resemblance to the life of Jesus.

Some took Paul's teaching to mean that it did not matter what one did. As long as one believed one could do essentially as one liked. And some did.

James felt that Paul's teaching had been taken to an extreme. He tried to counter the tendency to divorce the physical from the spiritual entirely. Hence his emphasis that the followers of Jesus were to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers."

Jesus dealt with a similar situation in the gospel story. There the Pharisees asked "Why" the "disciples" ate "with defiled hands?" In reply Jesus quotes from Isaiah saying that people honoured God "with their lips, but their hearts are far from me".

All this brings our liturgical practise into sharp focus. It could be argued that by using a set forms

of words and worshipping in the ritualistic way that we do that we risk getting so caught up in what we are doing that we forget why we are doing it.

We are of course creatures of habit. And most things that we do regularly we can tend to do without thinking. That is true for things like the morning routine. Driving the car or travelling on the bus or train.

It's worthwhile therefore to pause and remind ourselves why we do what we do when we gather for worship. The whole idea of our liturgy is to prepare us for the rest of our life. We are in essence rehearsing how to live the rest of our lives when we gather together.

The first section of the liturgy is entitled "gathering in God's name". It is there that we acknowledge that we have come intentionally to be with one another in the presence of God. We

are greeted with the words "Blessed be God" or similar.

We then have the opportunity to glimpse what the theme of the service might be as we listen to the sentence for the day. It is then time for us to acknowledge that we live in a world that is alive with all that is good and wonderful and all that is bad and destructive.

We can sometimes allow ourselves to become so immersed in our day to day activities that we lose contact with our priorities and focus. The gathering section provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge that we need help if we are enter fully into this time with God and one another.

Before the collect which brings this section to a close we join in either the Gloria in which we offer praise to God for all there is or a plea for mercy depending on the season.

Those seasonal options sum up the range of emotion that can accompany us as we gather for worship. We can come full of joy or full of despair, overflowing with love or burdened with guilt and pain.

By concluding the gathering with the collect of the day the liturgy offers the suggestion that what lies ahead in the readings of the day may well speak into the human condition we bring with us to worship. This is because the words of the collect gather a theme from the readings set for the day and express it as a prayer.

The next section of the liturgy is the "Ministry of the word". This is where we listen to the readings of the day from the Old and New Testaments, hear the preacher expound on them and then reaffirm our belief in the words of the creed. That is where we are in the liturgy at the moment.

Having listened to God through the scriptures and the sermon we then talk to God about our

concerns for the world, the church and for one another in the intercessions. The intercessor seeks to articulate the needs and concerns of the congregation in this address to God.

Our attention then turns to our relationship or communion with God in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We address those things that impair our relationship with God; our sins of omission and commission. Our oneness with God is made concrete through the sharing of the greeting of peace with representatives of the body of Christ.

The climax of the liturgy is the Thanksgiving prayer in which we thank God for all that God has done and especially for coming to us as Jesus the Christ. We are reminded that Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples and commissioned them to do this in remembrance of him.

Having gathered, listened to the scriptures, shared our concerns and received communion we are commissioned for our return to the world. The

dismissal “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” is a reminder that this is our vocation.

We are to be mindful of God in the whole of life and intentionally embrace God's world and invite God into our lives. We are to listen to God through reading the bible and attend to God's voice in our hearts and minds, in our dreams and in and through our exchanges with one another.

We are to bring our hopes and dreams to God along with our concerns for the world and those we love and we are to commune with God all day long. This is how our church believes we should live and this is what the liturgy; our worship ritual seeks to equip us to do.

Now it is possible to attend worship in body but not in soul. That is we can bring with us a mindset that says I am here (as some who have been compelled to participate might do) but don't expect me to engage with the service.

Such attendance would align with the words Jesus quoted from Isaiah, “This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”. If on the other hand we are prepared to be absorbed into the liturgy and allow the liturgy to be absorbed into us then the liturgy will shape us for the service of the Lord.

Paul and James both wanted people to have an authentic relationship with God. Paul did not want people to think that it would be possible to work their way into the kingdom by adhering to a strict interpretation of the Law of Moses and the regulations drafted by the teachers of the law.

He may well have been surprised by the way in which some chose to understand his instruction and would probably have welcomed James' clarification that the followers of Jesus were to “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers”. We are hearers only if we attend worship and don't engage or allow the liturgy to shape who we are.

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If we attend and allow the liturgy to shape who we are the liturgy will fashion us into the people God created us to be. God's hands and feet serving the world.

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