

WOW Sunday
Rooted in Grace: Christ in Me
James 2:14-17
Sunday, August 31, 2025

So, we've spent the last 3 weeks talking about God's grace: the gift of God through which we are enabled to entrust our eternal selves to Jesus' saving life, death, and resurrection; the gift of faith in Jesus through which our sins are forgiven and we are given new and eternal life.

But, as you might have figured out by now, what it means to have faith in Jesus is not as straightforward as you might think. There are a lot of Christians today who will tell you that being "saved" is strictly a matter of being justified; it's strictly a matter of believing the right things about God up here in your head, and thereby having your sins forgiven so you can go to heaven when you die. And what you do with your life between now and then is completely irrelevant. You can live however you want to.

And, on the other side of the spectrum, we have those who say how we live is all that matters. What we do determines whether we're saved. If we do enough good, and pray hard enough, then we're going to get into heaven when we die.

Now, of course, this isn't a new debate. It's been going on since the very beginning of the church. Our official Methodist doctrine, based in large part on the apostle Paul's writings, is that we are saved by faith alone. We can't DO anything to earn salvation.

But then, apparently on the other side of the debate, is Jesus' own little brother James, who said in James 2:14-17, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it?"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.”

You’ve probably heard that last part before: faith without works is dead. Many people have taken this to mean that James was in opposition to Paul; that while Paul preached salvation by faith alone, James preached that we are saved through our good works.

But, if you look carefully, there really is no difference of opinion between Paul and James on this. James is just taking it the next step. He’s pointing out what we talked about last week when we talked about God’s sanctifying grace. When we come to faith in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit works within us to transform us over the course of the rest of our lives more and more into the image of Christ. And, in fact as Paul said in our scripture from last week, it is actually *God’s Spirit within us* that enables us to do work for God. And, having been enabled to work for God, we do it—through serving those around us. We serve because Jesus served, because we are in the process of spiritually growing up to be like Jesus.

Doing good, helping those who need help, it isn’t something we do *in order* to be saved. It’s what we do as a *consequence* of being saved. It is evidence of the fact that we have been saved and it is a means by which God enables us to go deeper into our salvation—our *eternal* life. And so, when James says, “faith without works is dead,” what he means is, “faith that doesn’t live itself out by helping other people *isn’t really faith*.”

Which brings us to today. What we’re about today is living our real faith through service.

[logistics/schedule for WOW Sunday]

A few weeks ago, we held a celebration of life for Rolly Correa. Most of y'all knew Rolly. And, to know Rolly is to know that he embodied service. It's funny that we have been planning this WOW Sunday for months, well before Rolly passed away, and yet here we are, just weeks after his passing, doing something he would have absolutely loved and probably would have organized single-handedly. For those of you who were at Rolly's celebration of life, you'll remember how his son-in-law Brady Johntson said that Rolly's passing leaves a big hole in our lives and in our community. And you'll also remember how he challenged us to fill that hole. I hope today is the first of many steps towards us doing just that.