***TIME TO TAKE A LONG, HARD LOOK AT YOURSELF MM/OL***

**Today I want to talk about weddings, but, first we’ve got to get ready….**

**Right, up to the bathroom – it’s time to take a long, hard look at yourself in the mirror! What? After eleven weeks in lockdown I’m frightened to look! I have to confess that, when I *do* look in the mirror, as I (ahem) *reflected* in an earlier talk, I see someone a lot hairier and a bit older. What do *you* see? Tiredness? Anxiety? There can be a temptation to look away….but that’s called hiding from the truth. It’s like the ostrich who hides its head in the sand – it doesn’t see the lion coming….**

**The apostle James calls the *Bible* a mirror and urges us to look and keep on looking:**

***Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does (Jas. 1:23-5).***

**So, keep looking into the Bible says James. He talks about *listening* and *hearing* because he couldn’t imagine a world where ordinary people had the luxury of owning their own Bibles. But we can read or listen as it suits us. As Dave told us recently, we can all be *Bible detectives.* Look for yourself in its pages, James says, and take the necessary action. When I look in the mirror in the morning, I need to wash what’s dirty, brush what’s unruly and carefully shave whatever’s bristly. You’ll have your own appropriate routine, of course.**

**If we do look in the Bible, we’ll see ourselves on page one as God creates us in His image (Gen. 1:27) and we’ll meet ourselves in every chapter of every book. When we reach the New Testament it gets even more personal as we realise that God sent His Son called *Immanuel – which means, “God with us” (Mt. 1:23)* and we’ll read Paul’s words, *the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).* Sometimes we’ll be convicted of sin and need to repent – perhaps we’ll see ourselves as prodigal sons or daughters like in the parable (Lk. 15:11-32). Have a look and see for yourself.**

**Some of us may be feeling a bit low at present, in fact, I *know* you are because you’ve told me! Way back in the beginning, God said, *It is not good for the man to be alone* (Gen. 2:18) and, because, in Christ, there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28), we can be sure that it’s not good for the *woman* to be alone, either! But some of us have been all alone since March and all of us have missed each other and our families. Some of us are unwell or worried or broke. So let’s look in the mirror and see what image of ourselves we can see:**

**Rev. 21:1-5**

**Remember, the Bible’s a mirror: did you catch a glimpse of yourself? John saw a *bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* That’s you – the Church, the Bride of Christ as some of us saw in our studies in Ephesians recently (5:22-4). And, any men listening, because there’s neither male nor female in Christ, this includes you, too!**

**Look in the mirror again – if you’re Jesus’s *bride*, it means that, whatever *you* think of your reflection, Jesus *loves* it. Think of Ephesians again – *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (5:25).* He died for *you*. Why? Because you’re worth it!**

**Take another look – if you’re His *bride,* it means that, whatever *you* think of your attractiveness, He’s *chosen* you. *You did not choose me,* He said in Jn. 15:16, *but I chose you.* He didn’t choose the one who was perfect or the most popular or the most confident or the one who makes the most noise – He chose *you.***

**Take another look – but look *deeper.* What was it that God said to Samuel, long ago? *Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).* Look beyond the grey hairs and wrinkles or whatever bits you don’t like. How did John describe the Bride? *A bride beautifully dressed for her husband.* So what does your wedding dress - your wedding suit - look like? John describes it in Revelation ch. 19: *the wedding of the Lamb* (that’s Jesus (Jn. 1:29)) *has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. (vv. 7-8).)* Did you get that? The wedding clothes are *given* to you - you can’t afford to buy them! But you do have to put them on – as you humbly serve Him,your loving words and deeds and prayers – your *righteous acts* - are woven into your wedding suit!**

**As you peer into the mirror of God’s word are you seeing beyond the surface and getting a glimpse of how *Jesus* sees you? I hope so – but there’s more!**

**Do you remember Jesus’ famous words in John 14? *In my Father’s house are many rooms….I am going there to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (vv. 2-3).*  When He said those words, He was speaking as the Bridegroom making a promise to His bride. *I will come back,* He said*.* And here He is! What does He promise in Revelation 21? *Now the dwelling of God* [that is, Immanuel] *is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (v. 3).* He’s taking us home to His Father’s house - *a new heaven and a new earth.* What’s it like? Well, we don’t really know because *I am making everything new,* He said. There’s *no longer any sea*, but don’t worry about that – to the Hebrews, the sea was a symbol of the dangerous and unknown. Deadly storms could whip up even on the little Sea of Galilee (Mk. 4:35ff). But now there’ll be nothing to fear – *There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.***

**We were due to have had a wedding at Manor Mission Church on Saturday, but it had to be postponed because of the current circumstances. I’m pleased that it’s been rearranged for a few weeks hence when lockdown should be eased. I hope the weather’s better than last Saturday! The couple and all the other couples who have had their plans disrupted will have to wait just a little bit longer. But we’ll *all* have to wait just a little longer. Look in the mirror again….do you see tears of weariness, frustration, anger, sorrow, loss, pain….? Look again: what do you hear Him say? *[I] will wipe every tear from [your] eyes.* Can you be a little more patient as you wait for then? You can, because patience is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). And Jesus is worth waiting for!**

**So keep looking, because only by looking can you put right what may be wrong. What did James write? The one who looks deeply into God’s mirror perceives the truth and is set free. He dries our eyes so that we can see more clearly. You are His bride and He’s on His way for you. But, as with any wedding, there’s much to do to get ready, so, meanwhile, as we were told recently, make sure you keep oil in your lamp (Mt. 25:1ff)….**

***Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning….***

***Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting….***

***Give me love in my heart, keep me serving….***

***Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising…keep me praising till the break of day.***