

Pentecost 14 – Sermon at Wesley – 2nd September 2012

Theme: “Living out God’s Word”

Readings: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15 & 20-23

James 1:19-27

Text: “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can make them ‘unclean’ by going into them. Rather it is what comes out of a person that makes them ‘unclean’.”

Mark 7: 14-15

Introduction

Today is Father’s Day and we remember our fathers whether still with us or past. For me it is a little poignant, as this is the first Father’s Day that my father is no longer alive.

I think I’m nostalgic as I reflect back on the continuing legacy that my father left. He taught me to enjoy gardening, have a good work ethic, to look after my family well. He taught me attributes of honesty and integrity along with the pointlessness of raising your voice in anger.

It is appropriate that our two readings today speak about the way we live our lives as Christians, witnessing to the one we believe in and setting an example both to our family and to our community by the way we act, live and speak.

Let us look at both the Gospel and the Epistle readings shared with us.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15 & 20-23

In this Marcan passage we have Jesus and his disciples being criticised by the religious authorities for not performing the purification rites of washing before eating. The authorities, who had come from Jerusalem, were looking for ways to ‘sideline’ Jesus and his disciples. Jesus is up to the challenge and uses a quote from Isaiah 29:13 to rebuke them:

“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

Jesus makes it very clear that they are being legalistic in the way they interpret the commands of God to suit their own purposes. As I read this I thought of the ways that we often hang on to our own preconceived views of what we think God is saying without necessarily seeing the compassion of God at work through the teachings of Jesus. Possibly there is a challenge for all of us to

consider what Jesus was saying to the Pharisees so that we are not being hypocrites as well.

Jesus goes on to talk about the things that come out of the heart which make us 'clean' or 'unclean'. This is not a usual concept in our modern age but it was in Jesus' time. In Jewish understanding of Jesus' time, the heart was the seat and source of all thoughts. They used the heart as we would talk of the mind today. Jesus says that from within us is the source of 'evil' such as sexual immorality, theft, murder, greed, adultery, envy, slander, arrogance, lewdness and folly. Quite a list that is thrown at the Pharisees and us today. It is these things from within, that when they come out in the way we live our lives that make us 'unclean' in the sight of God. It is not the rituals that matter but rather the way we live life, to put it in a modern setting that is important.

Jesus is not trying to make people feel guilty. Rather he is saying we need to look at our relationship with God and with others and live life appropriately and not allow the 'unclean' to come out. How true for living a full and enriching life that allows for mentoring those who are young in their faith to grow positively.

Jesus reminds us of what is important in faith and it is not the rituals for the sake of rituals. Rather it is what is in our hearts and minds.

James 1:19-27

Our Epistle reading from the letter of James is a practical passage, as is all of the letter, written to Jewish Christians teaching them to live out their faith. There is considerable practical advice contained within the verses here - let me share a few of them with you:

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." vs 19b

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." vs 22

"If anyone considers themselves religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on their tongue, they deceive themselves and their religion is useless." vs 26

These sayings could easily have come from the book of Proverbs and in a sense are Christian proverbs for us today.

One of the joys of having a 2 and a half year old grandson is seeing them develop especially in speech. Joshua is far less frustrated now that he can explain what he wants. The other thing is that he is a parrot in his speech, often repeating everything you say and

sometimes mimicking your actions as well. This can be both a plus and a minus. You need to be careful in what you say and what you do as someone is listening and watching all the time. Suddenly you will hear your words coming back to you or your actions being repeated. Fine if what you say and what you do are all OK but you have to be careful not to lead Joshua into bad habits or others whatever the age.

As I thought about it, it is no different with our faith. Teaching begins at a young age and we need to make sure that all areas of our life are consistent with what we believe.

James finishes with the words:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” vs 27

Conclusion

On this Fathers’ Day we have good instruction from both Jesus and in the letter of James about living our lives in a Christ like manner so that we may be witnesses to all. Not allowing base elements to come out from within but speaking and doing what is appropriate. This is part of our faith and part of our witness to one another, our family and the wider community. It is appropriate to be reminded about this today. Amen!

Prayer

Spirit of new creation, please renovate us with your holy love.

Be in our deeds, that our hands may surprise us with their skill and gentleness.

Be in our minds, that our thoughts may startle us with new wisdom and humility.

Be in our feelings, that our hearts may uplift us with compassion and courage.

Be in our praying, that your love may flood us with wonder, peace and joy.

Spirit of new creation, let your glory flame out from our ordinary lives. Amen.

Bruce Prewer