

The Last Sunday after Trinity

Collect: Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 2.1–8: You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain,² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery,⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Gospel Reading Matthew 22.34–end: When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’”? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Reflection:

When the questioning of Jesus by the Sadducees and Pharisees comes to an end, we hear Jesus talking with them of the Messiah and challenging the limited expectations of the Messiah that these religious leaders have. He has taught them through a number of parables and the most recent being that of the owner of the vineyard who sends his son to bring in the harvest but who the tenants have killed. In hearing this parable, the religious leaders might have considered that the son’s coming to the vineyard indicates that the father himself had died. For in this parable we find a final throw of the dice by the owner of the vineyard reaching out fully of himself to those he loves. We must then take very seriously meaning of the killing of the son in this parable, and also recognise that the killing does not change the message or change what is to come, the promise of a new community, the new living temple who will include those St Paul commends to us in his letter. The rejected stone that through death has become the cornerstone.

Earlier in the passage is a more familiar teaching of Jesus about the two great commandments. Commandments that come from the Jewish tradition and reference also the golden rule of world faiths, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

This week I enjoyed listening to a streamed lecture by the former director of the British Museum and the National Gallery, Neil MacGregor. He urged Christians to be more open to learning from other faiths. The practical and generous offering of food to all at Sikh worship centres which is known as langar. Something he noted in lockdown when a local Indian restaurant was able to provide food for homeless people during the closure of the kitchen at St Martins in the Field. And there was a piece on Channel 4 News this week about a Birmingham taxi driver working with the Midland Langar Society, delivering food to children and families.

MacGregor asked of Christians to consider more fully from Hinduism the respecting of relationships with the natural world and in so doing respecting the divine and also from Hinduism to have a more nuanced consideration of gender in relation to the divine. And his critique of Christianity: that too little attention is given to wisdom and her insights.

And MacGregor a Catholic, describing himself of uncertain faith and constant questions, also commended the theme of Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. All brothers and sisters. "Where there is inequality the Pope urges a fairer distribution, where there is digital trolling he asks for kindness, when politicians hate, he recommends dialogue, where there is ideology, he calls for faith." Like his thirteenth century namesake St Francis, who crossed the battle lines of the Crusades to meet the Sultan of Egypt in a bid to end conflict, in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope commands us to have openness of heart which knows no bounds and transcends differences of background, nationality, colour and religion.

Fratelli Tutti also draws on the parable of the Good Samaritan which is the way in which in St Luke's Gospel we find an expansion of thinking about today's Gospel passage. In this we find Jesus responding to the question "Who is my neighbour?" by telling the parable and asking at the end "Who was neighbour to the man who was left for dead?"

Recently I used the word pity to refer to God reaching out in love and it is pity that is the response of the Samaritan to the wounded man. However our contemporary use of the word pity does not really get to the heart of expressing how deeply the Samaritan is moved, how great is his compassion and how deeply he feels compelled to pour out his love and to ensure that the wounded man is healed and is safe.

And at the same time Jesus surprising his listeners because the one who has compassion and acts in the way he does, is a Samaritan, one historically at enmity with, so an enemy of the wounded man. It is going the extra mile but going further, it is putting aside prejudice and identity and thinking only of the need of the other person. And his initial act of compassion is then followed up by his commitment to the ongoing care of the wounded man who he takes to an inn, a place of welcome, acceptance and now for the wounded man there really is new hope.

The Son of David, Jesus the healer and teacher, giving us a parable to grow our faith from. From the place of murder in the parable of the Vineyard, from the place of a mugging in the parable of the Good Samaritan we find the wisdom of God coming through and being shown through human courage, kindness and compassion. In Matthew's Gospel this is the final occasion when we find Jesus, by his teaching, still reaching out in love to those who disagree with him and in Luke's Gospel we have a parable to stay with us always, giving us in a practical way the wisdom of God to bring transformation and to help us to keep hope alive.