

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Zech 9:9-12      Psalm 45:10-end      Romans 7:15-25a

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end**

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Those who compile the lectionary (set the readings for each Sunday) have given us something quite interesting this week. They have given us two sections from chapter 16 of Matthew's gospel with a gap between them. The gap serves to highlight the contrast Jesus is making in how he has been received by those around him. And, I think there is a lot for us to learn about our reactions in faith from exploring the contrast.

First Jesus compares those in the crowd to squabbling children who can't co-operate in their play. When some want to play at celebration the others won't join the dancing; when the game is melancholy others won't join in the mourning. I sure anyone who has children or grandchildren or has observed little ones at play can imagine this picture vividly, particularly if it is at the end of play time! Jesus is using the picture to highlight how both he and John the Baptist have been rejected despite their style of ministry being very different. The ascetic John in his counter cultural poverty dismissed as demon possessed while Jesus' clear enjoyment of food and wine and convivial company was getting him labelled as a glutton or a drunk.

It is worth just pausing with that image too – do we know the Jesus who enjoyed himself so much that critics thought he was a glutton and a drunk? There is a lovely picture called "the Laughing Christ" which it might be worth looking out for if you struggle with this. Jesus is certainly contrasting his own lifestyle with John's, he is not critical of John but is confirming that his holiness is expressed in a different way – sharing simple pleasures with those around him.

The main point of his comments then, is that so many around them cannot see the gifts from God that he and John are offering because they actually don't know what they truly want, they are not in touch with their deepest desires and they cannot recognise the wisdom of God when it is in front of them.

There is a deep link between knowing our deepest desires and the idea of God's "wisdom". Wisdom in the Hebrew and Christian tradition is a word for the deep principles of creation by which God brought things to be and keeps things in being. It includes the idea that each created thing has been given its nature by God and flourishes when it lives in accordance with that nature. Each person is made by God with a particular make-up for a particular person, finding God's wisdom in our lives means living according to the will God has for us, the way God made us to be – that is how we flourish however challenging our way might be.

John the Baptist flourished as the one called to prepare Jesus' way with a radical call to everyone to turn back to God and he lived out his message wholeheartedly in a rigorous prophetic removal from normal life. Jesus flourished as the one sent by God to reveal God's-self in the midst of everyday life, he flourished by showing all were called to the fullness of life as he partied with outcasts, and that all that God has created is good if used well.

It is not just the people of Jesus' generation who struggle with discovering the wisdom of who they truly are as the beloved children of God. We all do to some extent or another and so much around us reflects the lack of grounding in a strong sense of identity as those loved for who they are by the source of who they are of our society as a whole. Our consumer culture encourages people for look for meaning in their possessions, varying with the trends of fashion, as contrary as children in the market place. In contrast, many counter-cultural movements try to impose fixed identities for people to live up to as good members of a religion or philosophy.

Jesus points us to a different way to discover what we desire and what we were made for: the wisdom of God.

And, as the second half of the gospel today highlights that wisdom is not some over complicated body of knowledge that the studious take a life time to earn; it is the simple message that Jesus has been given to share, and that the infants, the least sophisticated have grasped. It is the wisdom that is personified, revealed in person, by Jesus.

Saying that does not mean that we have to learn a whole list of what Jesus teaches (a whole other body of knowledge) – but very simply that we have to allow ourselves to response to his invitation: “Come to me” and be open to what we will be shown in our own lives as a result.

What Jesus does give here though, is a guide to what following him feels like.

The invitation to come to him is addressed to those who feel they are carrying burdens. I wonder if you feel burdened? Give some time to that question, allow yourself to acknowledge any weight that arises as you think about it – it could be something in your life circumstances, it could be something that you feel you have to carry because of your faith.

Listen to what Jesus is saying:

“I will give you rest!”

The burdened feeling is something God desires to relieve.

Jesus then talks of taking up his yoke – yoke yourself to me – the bar that connects two oxen in ploughing or pulling a cart. If we travel yoked to Jesus, we are guided and learn from him – a gentleness and a humbleness of heart.

Jesus shows us the wisdom of God in human life – what it looks like for a human being to live fully in tune with the purpose God have for him – to flourish as the one God calls him to be. His is human nature living in wisdom. To be yoked alongside him is to discover with him how we live in tune with the purpose God has for each one of us, for our human nature to be full of wisdom. And Jesus is clear in his description of what this is like: gentle and humble of

heart, an easy yoke, a light burden, the discovery of rest for our souls, as we were created to be.

If we have discovered that rest, that journeying in tandem with Jesus who guides us into eternal life in its fullness, then we will also know what we truly desire – the things in life that bring us that contentment and consolation which are God's gifts. We will have recognised in Jesus the wisdom that shows us when to dance with him and when to weep with him, when to dance in the world he loves, and when to weep with it.

So, the invitation to "come to Jesus" this week is about noticing where our souls feel fragmented and pulled in different directions as we try to work out how we should be spending our time, or where we feel burdened by the responsibilities and challenges of life and to let go of these feelings into God's hands.

And it is about noticing when we feel content or consoled, with our souls at rest and asking God to show us that we are close, yoked to Jesus, in these times, asking God to show us how these are times of response to his wisdom, guiding us to be the people he is calling us to be, asking God how to stay with these experiences and learn from them that God's will for us is the rest of our souls in him.

Lord Jesus, help us receive your yoke with joy as we journey with you to find the rest you offer in all we do and say and are. Amen