

Sunday 5th September 2021

Readings

James 2:1-10, 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

Reflection

Alongside our readings this morning I would like to share with you some verses from Proverbs 22: (verses 1,2,8,9)

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold.

The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all.

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail.

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

Let me share with you a story based on a Jewish Folk tale

There was once a very important man who worked in the city. He was well rewarded and had an expensive car, and expensive house and all the gadgets you might imagine. Being very important he often invited clients out for expensive business lunches but made sure to avoid areas where beggars lived in doorsteps, and if he couldn't, he would distract his clients with fine tales or point to the fine architecture around.

One evening, after a very busy day, he tidied his desk and packed his briefcase ready to leave for his home where a fine meal would be waiting. As he checked his desk drawer for his keys, he noticed a sandwich, still wrapped, at the back of his drawer. He could not remember putting it there but knew it had not been that day, so he removed it, not wanting it to go mouldy in the drawer, and put it in his pocket to dispose of later. As it happened on his way out of the building, he passed a homeless person in a doorway and almost without thinking took the sandwich from his pocket and gave it to the man with the words, something for your supper.

That night, after a rich supper and ample refreshment, the man retired to bed where he had the strangest dream. He was away on a business trip and after the meetings he and the other attendees were taken out for dinner to the finest restaurant in the city. The menu was filled with the richest foods known and one by one they ordered made their choice and then sat back to enjoy a pleasant evening. One by one their meals arrived, Pate de foie gras, venison, rack of lamb, turbot with the most amazing accompaniments. The man watched in wonder, his mouth watering, then the waitress placed his meal in front of him, on his plate was a plain sandwich, not dissimilar to the one he had removed from his desk earlier.

Astounded and annoyed he turned to the waitress and asked what she thought she was doing. Was this the way to serve an important man, was this the best the restaurant could offer? Smiling the waitress replied that the man was mistaken, he was not in a restaurant but was in heaven, and they could only serve what people had sent on ahead while they were alive. In his case, they had double checked, but all that was stored under his name was this little sandwich!

Our passage from James reminds us that we are not to judge others, and that means we should not show prejudice in our dealings with people. How often do we look at the lives of others and make assumptions? Even feeling sorry for someone's circumstances can involve assumptions, thinking that because they do not have what we have they feel as we might in similar circumstances. The way of Jesus is about connecting with people, sharing with them but also asking them what they need and how they feel, learning from each other. This action honours our oneness, giving vicariously without the conversation about need is often not really giving of ourselves. It is a difficult challenge and yet throughout the gospels we read of Jesus meeting, eating with and healing many whom society had rejected, and we know it is what following the way of Jesus means for we are all,

as Proverbs points out, born of the creator and equal in God's creation. It is often the lottery of birth that determines the opportunities we will have, and we are witnessing in Afghanistan the dangers of being born female in some countries even today. Jesus welcomed all to listen and learn as demonstrated in the story of Mary and Martha, and in our reading from Mark we have another demonstration of this in his response to the Syrophenician woman.

There has been much written about this passage and how it should be interpreted but the significant point is that it follows a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees on the topic of purity laws, with the Pharisees commenting on the fact that the disciples were not keeping these laws. At the time of Jesus the purity laws only applied to Pharisees and temple officials, not generally amongst the Jews and so many argue that the debate was part of the wider discussion over to whom Jesus mission applied, just the Jews or to the wider community. The first half of our reading from Mark is about the mission to those beyond Israel. The woman asks Jesus for help and his reply seems to indicate that he is there to help Israel, however the woman challenges him and in her challenge Jesus recognises a faith that embraces his message, the message of oneness. We will never know how this interchange actually happened, the emotions and the nature of the discussion, but this story and the story of the healing of the man born deaf which follows it, demonstrate that the mission of Jesus was to the whole community. Indeed, the healing stories are all about wholeness, and the restoration of oneness at an individual and at a community level.

Following the way of Jesus let me end with another story

Once upon a time there was a good King, much loved by his people. He was generous and fair and always looked out for everyone in his land. As the King grew older, he was saddened to think that he had no sons to carry on his work. Giving much thought to this he decided to adopt a son who would become King and carry on his care for the land. An advert was drafted, with the only requirements being that applicants must love God and love their neighbour.

Many young men, and some not so young, saw the advert and decided to apply, some of them ignored the requirements completely and others decided they would convince the King of their suitability. Amongst those who saw the advert was a poor peasant boy who knew he could not apply because his clothes were ragged and not fit for meeting the King. He decided that he would work hard and buy some new clothes so that he could apply, and that is what he did.

Dressed in his new clothes he set off for the palace, dreaming of meeting the King. On his way he came across an old man, whose clothes were even worse than the ones he had discarded, and whose body was shivering with cold. Without a moment's hesitation the boy took off his new jacket, his trousers and his warm shirt and gave them to the man, accepting the man's worn-out clothes in exchange. He walked on but recognised he could no longer apply for the position, but he could look at the palace.

As he stood outside the palace the doors opened and he saw the King enter, as he did so the King said something to the gatekeeper. The boy was astounded when the gatekeeper beckoned him over and let him enter the palace. He was shown to where the King was sitting, there was something familiar about the King, and then the boy gasped as he realised why the King looked familiar, he was wearing the clothes the boy had given to the old man. The King stood and walked over to the boy and embraced him, knowing that he had found the son he needed to carry on caring for his Kingdom.

Let us take a moment to reflect on these readings and stories as we listen to Joan Baez singing There but for fortune. [Listen here](#)

Suggested Prayer

Gracious God, whose presence is embedded within the being of all creation we bring our thoughts and prayers for the world, ourselves, and the future.

As we watch the news, we cannot escape the evidence of prejudice within the world. People are treated differently because of race, colour, or abilities. We recognise the injustice which fuels violence and turns communities into ghettos, and ordinary citizens into refugees.

Loving God in our living may we turn from prejudice, resist assumptions and build relationships of love and hope.

We offer our prayers for all those who are victims of injustice and prejudice, through knowledge of your presence may they find hope and courage, and the strength to be one in their challenge of an unfair system. May we support them through openness and generous sharing, living in oneness with all people.

We think of those who seek refuge in our own communities, hoping and dreaming of a future free from prejudice and with the opportunities to build a new life. May we be welcoming of the stranger recognising your presence within all people.

Loving God in our living may we turn from prejudice, resist assumptions and build relationships of love and hope.

Through the words of scripture we are challenged to live differently, and through the teaching of Jesus we are encouraged to share more openly. As we walk the way of Jesus together may we reflect on these stories and listen for your wisdom as we seek to be church in community. May we find courage and strength to live differently and be the example of oneness that we hear in the message of Jesus becoming the hope that can build the kingdom of love within the world.

Loving God in our living may we turn from prejudice, resist assumptions and build relationships of love and hope.

Loving God, we pray for the coming days. As we witness the stories on the news may we find creative ways to share our concerns, and witness to your love, that all may know they are loved and belong, wherever they are and whoever they are. As we pray together we pray for guidance in our life together, and an overflowing of love which offers a glimpse of the peace of oneness within our communities and the world.

Loving God in our living may we turn from prejudice, resist assumptions and build relationships of love and hope.

May we recognise where our words and actions have been less than loving to family and friends and seek to change our ways as we walk the way of Jesus. May we have the courage to be honest and ask forgiveness as part of our commitment to oneness. In Jesus name Amen

Suggested hymns

Lord of creation to you be all praise

Help us accept each other