

Sunday 20th March 2022

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Readings **Isaiah 55:1-9**
 Luke 13:1-9

Reflection

Our passage from Isaiah is a reminder that we need spiritual food, for as Jesus is quoted as saying 'man cannot live on bread alone'. So, what is spiritual food?

Spiritual food is freely available but often we don't partake of it and our lives run on empty tanks. We spend money and time pursuing happiness, yet we can find contentment in right relationships, with God and with one another.

God is everywhere, not hidden, other than in plain sight, and yet often we don't make time to see God all around us, to cherish creation and learn from one another. When we live consciously in God, when we choose to live in oneness we are different, our lives become candles in the dark, others notice and are attracted to the light that is God's love.

God's ways are higher than most of our human ways. In God we are encouraged and empowered to make the highest possible choice, to choose as God chooses, giving of our best to others. Often, we are unaware of the effect we are having on others, sadly that is also the case when our actions are less than loving, when we do not make the highest choice. When we are not careful with our words and opinions then our attitude can influence others negatively. They can set off a chain reaction of bad mood which ripples out and affects many more people. When we choose love that is always an influence for good and the ripples go way beyond where we might imagine. The bible is full of stories about what happens when people make ill-advised choices. It is also full of stories about people trusting in God and making time to take spiritual food.

God's love wants the best for us and fills us with enough strength to face the challenges of life, but we must spend time taking spiritual food. We need to study together, share together, and discover together. We need to learn to join the dots and recognise the best path to take when faced with choice. History shows us the link between choices and consequences. I was listening to Justin Welby in conversation with Susan Blackmore, they were exploring their two different perspectives on freewill. Susan is a scientist specialising in consciousness and does not believe in God, at least not the God of religion. She questions a naïve assertion of freewill explaining that the choices we make are influenced by many things such as our experience, our upbringing, our mood even, and that all choices have consequences the knowledge of which will also influence our decision. So, she asks just how much freewill do we have? Justin Welby gave the Christian understanding, but it was an open and responsive exchange in which you felt both were listening to each other. There as also a link to repentance which Justin explained is about choosing a different path when you recognise your choices are hurting others and probably yourself. In our passage from Luke Jesus is also saying don't ignore the lessons of history, let your experience and the experience of others inform your choice and help you make a better choice. If you find yourself on a path less than loving, then turn around and find a different path. Then he tells a parable, very short and one which leaves us with even more questions than usual. It is easy to summarise this parable:

Don't make hasty decisions,
don't dismiss others without offering encouragement,
be patient in your dealings with others,
don't always expect fruit, especially instantly.

Just as Isaiah said good words can take time to bear fruit, so the way of Jesus means choosing wisely and being an influence for good in the world even when it sometimes feels a waste of time. But this story is also about new beginnings, and they are important. However, often the perceived downside

is having to let go of some things, to be willing to move on and grasp something new we often have to lay something down. It can be a hard choice, but we are a pilgrim people, we are on the path to the fullness of our humanity which I believe is well worth a few difficult decisions.

Susan Durber, exploring this parable, suggests it may speak of the tension of not knowing. By not giving his listeners any discernible answers, Jesus is inviting them to explore the questions. That is so often where we find ourselves when faced with choice, there are too many questions, and we don't know the answers and so we must trust. We must trust in love, in God, in wisdom and learn from experience. We must trust in the loving nature of creation and the wisdom within ourselves. When we listen to that small voice within, we can be surer of the way forward. As church we trust in each other when we make decisions, that is the nature of our church meeting, we share together, we explore our feelings, and we listen for that sense of leading which we call God. Often, we will not know for certain the outcome, but we choose the best way forward that we can, and we learn to let go and be in the presence of God. Sometimes our hearts and heads feel to war with one another, we feel torn, but this probably means we know what we should do but we are reluctant to make the decision because it will mean change. However, change is all around, and we live very different lives from our parents and grandparents and that is what we expect, so we need to be bold in our faith and trust in the love of God to lead us forward from every crossroads that we encounter. We do not do it alone for we are church and that means sharing together. That is the Jesus way, to recognise our oneness and live in the light of love, being open to God around us and trusting in the wisdom of the Spirit within us.

Suggested Hymns

Now thank we all our God
Seek ye first the kingdom of God
God who has called us to live by your grace
The Lord's my shepherd (Stewart Townend)
Let there be love shared among us