

Sermon for 16.10.16

In the gospel of Luke there are more parables than in any other gospel.

The parables of Jesus embody much of his fundamental teaching.

They are quite simple, memorable stories, often with humble imagery, each with a single message.

They identify with every day life events familiar to many people throughout every age.

There are two parables in today's reading, one about a widow and an unjust judge-- and the other about a tax collector and a Pharisee.

The gospel passage begins "then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart."

Many contemporary theologians understand that this passage was included by the gospel writer to give encouragement to the early Christian groups who were suffering isolation and rejection from the wider community.

The early Christians lived together in beleaguered groups and waited anxiously for what they believed would be an imminent return of Jesus, who would vindicate them and their faith.

In the parables today Luke draws out lessons for these communities. Lessons that are meant to support followers in the belief that God would not abandon them, and that they should not abandon God because things were not working out as they hoped.

The parables bring home to them that they must remain faithful through steadfast prayer till the end.

The question that they must face is not whether God will remain faithful to them-- but will they remain faithful to him throughout all times - unexpected and tough times.

The widow in the first parable represents powerlessness, for in a patriarchal society, a woman on her own without a husband or any male support had very little value in the tradition, and was literally powerless in the society.

The gospel writer draws on this example to show if the persistent pleading of the powerless widow, triumphs over a powerful judge who had no regard for God or for anyone, how much more will the persistent praying of Christian disciples achieve.

Now continual prayer is not only meant here. It is more about what drives the prayer -- it must be faithfulness to the God of Jesus.

In the second parable, the message is that virtuous works will not earn entrance into God's kingdom.

Works of self-justification such as those of the Pharisee equate for Luke to unrighteousness whereas the tax collector who knew he was in need of God's mercy displayed righteousness for all to see -- he couldn't even lift his head to heaven but beat his breasts, which was a sign of repentance.

The combined message of the two parables, is about persistent heartfelt prayer empowered by dependence upon the gracious God who will act to vindicate faithfulness to Him.

In its biblical sense, the heart denotes the whole person, with particular accent on one's inmost being.

In the heart dwells feelings and emotions, desires and passions.

Jerimiah tells us this morning: "deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it upon their hearts (jr 31:33).

In the contemplative tradition and the way of the Christian mystics of every age, it is specifically the hearts of people that God Calls to conversion, to new life.

The contemplative tradition accepts that the heart is where God recreates us in his own image and likeness, transforming and purging that which needs to be transformed.

The heart is above all the place of sacred encounter between the human person and God.

The contemplative tradition also understands prayer to be the foundation of life in Christ. This understanding is not new, it has very traditional and orthodox foundations since the first century.

I am very thankful that this parish functions on a prayerful foundation.

We practice many forms of prayer here.

Presently a group of parishioners are praying our way towards the season of Advent with Lectio Divina prayer.

This form of prayer is a gentle way of praying the scriptures. Using a short passage of scripture we simply sit quietly and contemplate the words.

Resting in scripture and allowing the meaning to speak to us in our uniqueness, can be very enlightening and effective in our personal journey into transformation.

We also gather together at All Saints for *Taize prayer*. You will notice our Taize prayer nights advertised in the pew sheet each month and all are welcome to attend.

*Prayers for the Parish* which will be held this afternoon at St Matthews uphold parishioners and God's ministry here in this place.

*Accompanying personal prayer* is offered after each service at the 9 am service at All Saints.

*Group contemplative prayer* and the *prayer chain* are also areas of prayer ministry here at Grovely parish.

It is wonderful to know that the children today who are admitted to Holy Communion in our parish, are being admitted to a prayerful community in which they are encouraged to join in prayerful dependence upon God.

For as Christ's disciples in 2016 we need to be as persistent as the widow, who never gave up.

We also need to be like the tax collector, through our acknowledgement of the need of the merciful love of God to accompany us, lead us, surround and transform us, as we await what lies before us -the return of his son Jesus the Christ.

The Lord Be with you.