

## Sermon for 28.8.16

It is a rare event to have such a short Old Testament reading that is so perfectly succinct. I guess that is what a proverb is. A short pithy saying that expresses word of truth.

In today's Psalm we hear again word of truth being upheld in the opening beatitude about fear of the Lord, for Yahweh's commands are the source of delight.

And in gospel story we hear, and visualise, the word of truth made flesh in Jesus.

He is the chief guest at the dinner given by a Pharisee, and as the narrative tells us, he was on show to others present. *They were watching him*, in the words of the gospel.

As it happens Jesus was also watching them, for when he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable that spoke about shame that comes with the way of self-exaltation, and about honour that comes with the way of humility. For God who knows all about the heart will not be fooled by one's self-promotion.

Therefore upholding the other person, whoever they may be, in a positive light, allows the way of humility to flow and in this, is honour.

In the gospel reading Jesus also connects humility with inclusivity.

He warns the host that he should not confine his guest-list to the well to do – acceptable people and relatives, but should include the less fortunate in society. For if the host only invites those who can repay him in like style, his action is motivated by an ulterior motive, rather than by authentic generosity.

Jesus is not forbidding normal social life here, rather his words expose the fragile patterns of solidarity that well established class systems were built upon. Such patterns tell a story about individual confidence and security within an established system that keeps others at bay or on the outside of the system.

Jesus makes it clear that the righteous who are to be repaid at the resurrection of the just, are those who have shared the food of life with the disadvantaged. The living Word, the Word made Flesh, proclaims humility and inclusivity as the nature of God's kingdom.

This gospel passage is the first part of the wisdom teaching of Jesus in the gospel of Luke.

And it is particularly relevant for us today - this being in our church calendar - the day of prayer for refugees who by nature are the disadvantaged – fleeing their homeland and living beyond any system of familiar security .

In the reading from Hebrew's, we hear how Paul urges his readers in the way of mutual love. This passage speaks about relational wholeness in God's family on earth, even and especially in times of trouble.

*Remember, Paul writes, those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.*

First glance at this part of the reading might make us flinch. Just the thought of sharing in someone's bondage and torture, is enough to send us running –yet the sharing is meant in a heartfelt way rather than a physical one, and as such, it takes us beyond our isolating self-focus and into a more mutual mindset of empathy and understanding.

This way of being is largely foreign in today's world where individuality and self-focus have become the norm. Yet the way of mutual love and sharing in oneness together, speaks loudly and clearly about our newness in Christ. And this is what we are called to keep our eyes on – for we are a new creation in Christ. The mystics down through the ages understood it, wrote about it and lived it. To name a few, Tiehard de Chardin, Julian of Norwich, Clare of Assisi and of course St Francis – and you may remember in last week's sermon I touched on the way of St. Francis and how he saw everything in terms of the plural *we*, not the singular *I*.

This vision allowed him to let go of his inhibitions, while growing in his true identity in Christ and sharing this with others. The readings today ultimately speak about this way of relational wholeness which nurtures mutual love as the nature of God's kingdom on earth. This is what the Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today and for ever and who has told us, "I will never leave you or forsake you" gifts to all who will receive.

My prayer for us all, is that we savour the deep reassurance in these words, and seek through prayer, our newness which is oneness together in God.

At this point I would like to say something about stewardship, because I did say last week that I would talk about the way of our financial giving in two sermons. Today's sermon is the promised second one.

Well I think the best way to talk about it today, given the holistic content of the readings, is to say that our financial giving is part of the whole of who we are as Christian people.

It is not an added extra so to speak. It is not something tacked on but rather something that belongs to the fullness of mutual love in Christ.

Accordingly therefore, it holds as much importance in our Christian life, as does everything else we do.

And in mutual love, this is what I ask us all to do.

Consider your financial giving in the fullness of who you are in Christ.

Sit with God in prayer - be still with God in prayer, and enter into oneness with him. Continue to grow in this prayerful relationship with God, as he continually is in relationship with each one of us, and respond in the sacrament of giving with the same fullness and continuity.

Our blessed stewardship or financial giving, will then belong to the whole heart to heart relationship that we have with our God in Christ. The Lord be with you.

