

Sermon for 1.10.17

The message in the gospel parable this morning, is largely about repentance and renewal and what emanates from this holy journey.

The gospel narrative describes the toing and froing between Jesus and the chief priests when he enters the Temple and they question Jesus' authority.

Ultimately, in this encounter, Jesus reveals their lack of integrity in their commitment to authentic ministry – they may well make all the right noises but, when the chips are down they sit on the fence – they do nothing. Jesus hammers home this point in three parables.

We hear the first parable in today's passage which demonstrates, through the responses of two sons to the Father, that children of God cannot be all noise and no action.

In the parable when asked to do something by the Father, the response of the first son is, *I will not go*, but later he changes his mind and goes. His attitude is the model of the journey of repentance and renewal - once rebellious, then changed and then obedient to God's will.

On the other hand the second son eagerly volunteers – when asked by the Father - *I go*, he says, but he does not go. He makes all the right noises of obedience, but not with corresponding action.

In a personal context, the attitude of the first son, describes our journey of who we are as followers of Christ.

We are to be those who are open to our own change, we are to be those who receive the newness of transformation, we are to be those who let ourselves be comforted, fed and protected.

We are to be those who are on a life's journey in the nature of repentance and renewal.

This continual journey is a life of transition growing us up into a spiritual maturity – in which we are called not settle down into complacency or unconvincing piety.

The ongoing nature of this holy journey and the suffering we experience through personal loss (dying to self), can teach us a genuine understanding and empathy for others and **their** trials and tribulations in life.

Now in the corporate sense, that of the church, the parable delivers the same message – that we are to be a church on the holy journey of repentance and renewal. Rather than one that makes all the right noises but does nothing.

This parable speaks into our own time as church for there are presently many questions around the authority and integrity of our church.

In all honesty when we, the church, ask ourselves, *have we been like the chief priests in the gospel reading and made all the right noises without corresponding action* – our answer, in terms of the care of the most vulnerable, our children (as the Royal Commission into sexual abuse in Institutions has revealed), - I'd say is a definite Yes we have.

So what are **we** to do now? How are we to continue?

Well we don't just give up, or turn in on ourselves, or seek to give in to a sense of hopelessness or pessimism. For when we do this, we can forget, as the ancient Jews did in the first reading - that God is our reality.

We can, as they did, feel abandoned by God. We can feel, as they did, that we are on our own. Yet this is not so, as the ancients came to learn. Manna rained from heaven.

In reality, God remains with us and he continues to make provision for **our** holy journey of repentance and renewal.

Yet how are we to continue on living with such a devastating historic truth ?

How do we recapture our integrity, our authority as God's children and God's church in today's world? Will it happen automatically through our journey of repentance and renewal? I would say not.

I believe we actually have to extend ourselves and exhibit our renewal, to each other and to society in great humility. And I quote here the words of Archbishop Phillip from his recent synod address: *I have no doubt that humility is required of us. Our own failures have drastically undermined the trust people once had in the church. That will be regained only slowly, over time, by us living humbly with integrity, acting justly, demonstrating kindness and generosity.*<sup>1</sup>

In his own words, the Archbishop reiterates what the apostle Paul writes about in the epistle today. *Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.*

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....*

May we personally and as church move in this Holiness, in awe, humility, thanksgiving and commitment!

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<sup>1</sup> President's Address to the 79th Synod, Diocese of Brisbane, 22 September 2017.p13.