

July 5th 2020 Sermon for 4th Sunday after Trinity

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Bible Reading Romans 7.15-25

Gospel Reading Matthew 11.16-19, 25-end

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today I want us to look at this very short gospel passage because within it I think are two really important messages, one leading out of the other. The first comes from that amazing sentence. "I thank you Father because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Wow, what a thing to say! As someone who has been incredibly fortunate to study at some pretty great places this is a sentence which really stands out to me and makes me question a lot. For a start were all those years getting those degrees a complete waste? Is our pursuit of knowledge foolish if God's message is hidden to the wise and intelligent and yet revealed to children? Does being a follower of Jesus mean we turn our back on logic and intelligence?

These are some big questions.

To attempt to answer them, first I think we need to look at what Jesus was saying before. Jesus has before been talking about how both John the Baptist and himself have been criticised for doing the opposite things. Where John the Baptist came and was neither eating or drinking, they called him a demon. Then when Jesus came eating and drinking, they said 'Look a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

There appeared to be no way of winning! The wise and intelligent were too proud to think they could learn something from either of these men. Instead they simply criticised them, tried to put them back in their place. Let's face it in the eyes of the world these two men were uneducated nobodies! What could they possibly offer those who had spent their lives learning in the best institutions the time had to offer?

So, the first thing Jesus is doing is criticising those who are too proud and think themselves too wise and intelligent. I think this is an important message for us today too. I've spent 6 years of my life apparently surrounded by the world's best and brightest and it is easy within those environments to become proud and boastful. To think you have little to learn from the world outside it.

And one of the other dangers that comes with it is inaction. You can spend so much time thinking and debating and challenging things that you end up doing nothing! This is something many of us might be guilty of, do we talk well about social justice and inequality, criticising what we see and yet do nothing? Are we like the people criticising John and Jesus happy to be critical yet offering nothing ourselves?

Jesus says – wisdom is vindicated by her deeds! We can have all the intelligence in the world but if we do nothing. We have no wisdom! God's message – this gospel of love is full of intelligence and wisdom but it is based in humility and around action! We must be prepared to learn from all people and all places and act on what we learn.

And hence Jesus then claims that the mysteries of God are revealed to infants and children. This isn't an anti-intellectual message but an incredible challenge for us in our pursuit of learning! Children learn at a rate much faster than any human. Their brains are sponges absorbing information

continually! It is much easier to learn a language as a child than it is as an adult. They are also happy to learn from all and anyone. My young nephews are constantly asking questions and behind it all there is the joy of learning. There is no pride or boastfulness. They do not think beforehand I won't ask that question because people will think I'm not very clever. They don't think... that person has nothing to offer me, what could I learn from them? No, they are happy to learn and ask questions and most of the time when young they are excited to do so!

So, we have two very different approaches to learning. That of those who claim to be intelligent and wise, this can be one of pride, boastfulness and arrogance and is perhaps something of a cover up, masking what is not known. Full of confidence to give off impressions of strength and power.

But that isn't how God operates, that is nothing like Jesus and in that mind set God does not make sense. But through the innocence and humility of an infant, who has no boast in any achievements or learning then God and Jesus' teachings can begin to be grasped.

Because Jesus' teachings can look foolish when we use the mindset of the world!

What farmer would leave ninety-nine of their livestock out in the open unprotected while they go off and search for the one which got away? That makes no sense, you risk too much for what would be quite an acceptable loss. And yet Jesus says in the parable of the lost sheep that that is what the God we follow would do.

What CEO would give the same wages to all their employees regardless of how much they worked? There would be no profit in that! And yet Jesus in the parable of the vineyard owner says that is what the kingdom of God is like.

What Lawyer would recommend to their client that when being sued for one coat they should also happily offer their cloak too! That lawyer would not have many clients. And yet Jesus tells us that is how we should respond in Matthew.

What Bank would consider lending to people with no expectation of ever getting anything back? And yet that is how Jesus tells us we should lend in Luke, as we are to love all and remove ourselves from thinking purely of self-interest!

What Political leader would tell a wealthy potential benefactor interested in supporting their cause to go away and sell everything to the poor and needy before coming back to follow them? And yet that is what Jesus does with the rich young ruler.

I could go on and on! But hopefully we begin to see that Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God and it looks so different to the world we see today. To the experts in their field they look like folly and foolishness. And yet I'm sure you can all see there is an amazing beauty to what Jesus says. An amazing vision of a different way of living, full of innocence and humility. The type of vision which a child can see, removed of cynicism. Of a world outside of our systems based on greed, selfishness and violence.

And there is our choice, we can dismiss Jesus for not fitting into the world today. For appearing foolish, innocent and naïve. We can ignore it, push it to the side, and seek to make it appear a joke.

Or we can grasp it by seeking to enter into a new world with a new mindset like that of an infant seeing and learning again for the first time. Because I believe if Jesus is God then our whole world view has to change.

And what happens if we do grasp this new way of seeing life and the world? Well it means that the weight of life, that burden placed on our shoulders by society and the world is lifted. The expectations that we are to live life living up to the world's standards are removed. The burden of needed to be more attractive, to be wealthier, to have more power, more friends, a bigger house, a better car etc. all these weights, pressures, burdens. They are removed.

Because what do we expect of an infant? Nothing!!! Simply being, living, experiencing, loving, learning is all an infant does. And that is all God is interested in. It takes the pressures of the world away from us. There is no longer the expectation we need to know everything, to understand everything. There is no longer the expectation to be the best mom or dad or to have the best job, or to force ourselves to the top of whatever ladder we are climbing. Because those are the expectations of the world and not God. Jesus was criticised for eating and drinking, for being with people, enjoying peoples company. That wasn't an appropriate use of time to the world. But is that not what, how an infant sees life. The joy of eating, drinking, being with people with no expectations. In that environment we are free to do our best without the burden of expectation and pressure.

And that's why Jesus then says the following...

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Because the World makes us weary and wears us down and will continue to do so. But when we come to Jesus we can finally find rest. He removes the expectations and burdens from us, and in doing so it frees us to do the same with each other. To love our brothers and sisters without expectation. To love even when we are let down, or hurt. To love like a child full of innocence and hope, without the burden of expectation which the world is desperate to load us with.

And so our God, our God of love speaks softly and humbly against the loud, sharp, angry noises of the world.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Amen