



Sunday Reflection

5th Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 5 July 2020

Pentecost 5

while all Church worship in the buildings is suspended

On this 5th Sunday after Pentecost, and the fourth Sunday after Trinity, we come into God's presence, trusting that God receives us as we are. As we worship, we ask that the Holy Spirit will energise our desire to give God glory and help us be willing to receive what the Son may make known to us.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

An Illustration to set the scene

As the young comedian toured the country with his one-man show, he was dreading the booking at the theatre of one particular town. Everyone knew that this was a place where the people had a reputation for being highly critical and very hard to please. The night of the show arrived. He took a deep breath and walked onto the stage. He went all out. He gave his very best performance, but to no avail. The audience sat in stony silence with frowns on their faces. He couldn't even raise a smile. Afterwards, feeling weary and wretched, he went off to buy a drink. Standing at the bar was a man he recognised – a man who'd been sitting in the front row of the audience. But, to the comedian's surprise, the man reached out his arm and shook the comedian's hand. "Well done, young fellow," he said. "You were brilliant. It was all I could do to stop myself from laughing!"

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Both Jesus and John the Baptist before him faced those who refused to be impressed. Whether it was the forerunner bringing the sober message of repentance, or Jesus himself bringing the joyful news of God's mercy, they couldn't get it right in the eyes of their critics.

Such encounters tell us as much about their audience as about the message – people who resist listening and learning anything new from God. They already know it all. Chief among them are the religious experts, well versed in theology and doctrine, who see themselves as equipped to exercise power over others' lives in matters of religious observance and judgement.

But Jesus is not impressed. He proclaims the truth that as the Son he alone has the fullest, unique knowledge of God from the inside. Human beings cannot attain this knowledge themselves. It can only be revealed by Jesus, with the authority that God has given him.

Those who can grasp such knowledge of God are not the religious experts, but those who know themselves to be as powerless as tiny children. These people are most open to encountering God afresh, as Jesus offers not a headful of theological information and instruction but a direct personal relationship with the divine. Such people have no illusions of grandeur. Indeed, they can become overwhelmed by the sheer demands of daily living as they try to meet the expectations placed upon them – sometimes by those of a religious persuasion. It is to these people that Jesus gives a particularly tender welcome. He invites them to come close, be willing to learn and follow him. The outcome will be souls set free to move more lightly by the power and love of his accompanying

presence. It is not God's nature to crush his creation by imposing unreachable expectations. It is only human beings who do that.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Jesus contrasts the so-called wise and gifted with the powerless and frailer folk on the margins. As believers, there is always a danger that we begin to feel we have little to learn, especially if we have been a faithful member of a church for some time and are familiar with how things are and ought to be done. Can we take note of who is at the margins, perhaps making time to listen to their experience of our community. How might we let go of our own "wisdom" and be open to learning like a child again?

We may not be part of the critical crew, but perhaps we feel part of the weary squad. We have become burdened with duties and responsibilities, perhaps taking on more and demanding more of ourselves than we are called to do. Sometimes it can feel that though we work for Jesus, we've lost touch with knowing him like we once did.

Whoever and wherever we are on the way, Jesus invites us to place ourselves humbly under his care again, to let go of all we carry, from our own capabilities to the burdens that others have placed on us. All Jesus asks of us is that we simply join him and surrender to his lead. He promises to be alongside us and keep us on track step by step at a gentle, sustainable pace.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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