



Sunday Reflection

18th Sunday after Pentecost

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



For Sunday 4 October 2020

Pentecost 18

On this 18th Sunday after Pentecost, and the seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, we are reminded that so often we underestimate the difference we can make – to our church, to our communities, to our own lives. So let us come to our worship trusting that, by God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit, each of us has something to offer that is worthwhile.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." Matthew 21:43

An Illustration to set the scene

For centuries economists have struggled to find a satisfactory way to quantify the economic health of a nation. In the seventeenth century an English economist, scientist and philosopher named William Petty developed a "theory of value", which incorporated a basic concept of what we now call GDP, or gross domestic product. GDP may be defined as a monetary measure of the market value of all the goods and services that are produced by a country in a specific period, usually a year. The modern concept of GDP was developed by the American economist and statistician Simon Kuznets in the 1930s, and from the 1940s it became the main tool for measuring the health of a nation's economy.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

This parable in today's Gospel reading is often known as "the parable of the wicked tenants", and is commonly interpreted as an allegory in which the Jewish leaders are represented by the tenants, God is the landowner, the prophets are the servants and Jesus is the son. As with all Jesus' parables, its rich imagery deepens our understanding of human nature.

It offers an insight into the terrible consequences of living unfruitful lives. The selfishness and laziness of the wicked tenants have festered to become far more than simply an absence of contribution. In their fruitlessness the tenants have become vicious, cruel and even murderous.

This parable uses the familiar metaphor of the vineyard, which we also heard in our reading from Isaiah. The Temple officials Jesus is addressing would have known that the vine often represents the Jewish people and, indeed, today's psalm reading provides another, beautiful, example: "O God of hosts... have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted."

So fruitfulness and productivity are the themes for the day across the readings. Turning back to Matthew, it appears that the Temple priests' idea of fruitfulness is to nurture and grow a worshipping culture in the Jerusalem Temple, bringing God closer to the Jewish people. Jesus shares this, but he goes much further. His ideals more closely resemble those of Isaiah and the earlier prophets, particularly Micah, who wrote that the way of holiness is to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God". Without these ideals, religious observance is pointless. Jesus shows in word and deed that true fruitfulness and meaningful productivity lie in living lives of justice, kindness and humility.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

If you are an economist or politician it might be necessary to know the GDP of a nation. Yet even Simon Kuznets who, you may remember, developed the concept, warned against its application as a measure of welfare. Indeed, living in one of the world's wealthiest economies it's possible to see poverty in all its forms – material, emotional and spiritual – all around. It might be comforting for citizens to know that they live and work in one of the world's richest economies. But if we are to live truly fruitful lives we need to look at the human stories which lie beneath the figures and jolt ourselves out of complacency. Because living in a wealthy nation doesn't help the single parent who relies on a food bank to feed their children, or the stressed businessperson on the brink of breakdown, or someone who's unable to recover from the grief of losing a loved one. People need material, emotional and spiritual support notwithstanding the statistics.

When the servants and the son approached the vineyard, the wicked tenants, acting out of selfishness and greed, saw only a way to avoid paying what they owed, an inheritance they could steal. They had come to view others simply in monetary and material terms rather than as flesh-and-blood human beings.

In order for us to live fruitfully it takes a small but important shift of outlook to start living and behaving in a way that supports and enables those around us to live more fruitful lives.

To do this we need first to really recognise and acknowledge each person as a child of the living God, rather than simply seeing what she or he represents. As we become more connected to one another our lives become richer, more vital, more purposeful, and we in turn become more alive to God working in our lives.

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” Matthew 21:43

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?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk