

Sermon for Trinity 7 2020

⁵⁴ He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? ." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

For those of us who worship regularly and have a firm belief in God it is strange to think that there are people who might doubt all that Our Lord said. The people in Jesus' hometown considered him only to be the son of Joseph and Mary, the sibling of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. In short, they refused to accept that a man with a common background could be a teacher, healer, or indeed have the close link to God that Jesus claimed to have. To them he was just another brat that grew up on the streets of their town.

I find it to be amusing because whenever I return to my hometown I am recognised as "young Adrian, the Son of Pearl and Wattie. The brother of Mervyn, Leonard and Grantley." I am acknowledged as a Priest of the church, and remembered as the brat who grew up in the streets of that small town. Would I ever return to that town as the Parish Priest? No, I would not. I would always be judged according to what my life was then.

This is what Jesus found in his hometown. He could not do much there, he did not heal many people, he did not teach much, he could not get the people to take him seriously. Perhaps this is the reason he asked the disciples whether they understood this round of parables. For it was certain that the people of his village did not.

The parables are profound. The first is an account of how a man discovered the kingdom by accident. He was not searching for it. He was simply ploughing the field. It was boring repetitive work. We might liken it to our day to day lives. It is routine, not much happens apart from that which we decide to schedule into our day. Suddenly we are confronted with something so special, so amazing, and so wonderful, that we decide that we must become totally immersed in it.

This is the experience of the man ploughing the field. The treasure, the kingdom, is so overwhelming that he was moved to sell everything he had to buy the field. He became totally committed to the kingdom. Totally committed to God. The experience is overwhelming. We might think about the conversion of St Paul. He was struck blind on the road to Damascus and he was healed by a disciple. His conversion to the faith was dramatic and sudden.

Of course there are other people who search for meaning and direction for long periods of their life. In the parable the man is searching for a beautiful pearl. It sounds as though the search has been long and arduous. Once again, he is moved to sell all that he has in order to purchase that one beautiful pearl. This is identifying the Kingdom of God as the greatest treasure of all.

In terms of the kingdom in these two very short parables we discover one person who finds faith by accident, and another who is diligently searching for it. Many of us might relate to one or the other. Our life may have consisted of searching and surprise.

When I felt the call to be a priest there was nothing further from my mind. Oh, it floated to the surface from time to time and was immediately pushed down into the depths of the subconscious. I was not searching for it and I did not necessarily want it. It was a significant surprise to me, and maybe to the people of my hometown, that I was called by God to go down this path.

This is the thing about God. We can make up all sorts of reasons for why we might not want to commit ourselves to him, but in the end a path becomes clear for us. Whether we are searching, or taken by surprise, we can be sure that God is influencing our lives in a very serious and practical way. It is God who is in charge. It is for us to recognise and to accept that this is so.

It is when we have discovered the Kingdom, accepted the call from God, that we will begin to concentrate on our relationship with God. Paul is exploring this with the people of his time. The question put before Paul is very straight forward: if sin generates grace from God, then we should sin lots so that God has the opportunity to increase grace in our lives.

It is like the tired old accusation suffered by some Roman Catholic, or even Anglo Catholic, people. Because of sacramental confession you can sin all you like during the week because God will forgive you on Saturday night. Of course, the accusation is nonsense, and this is the argument that Paul is responding to today.

He is answering people who are already a part of the kingdom. These people, either by searching or by accident, have accepted the kingdom. They are baptised and have given themselves to be slaves, servants, for the faith. For the Kingdom.

Paul is quite blunt in his response. He explains that when they gave themselves to Christ in Baptism, they had committed themselves to Christ. In their Baptism they were freed from slavery to sin, and placed on the path to righteousness. He uses terms like slaves to sin, and slaves of righteousness. He asked them what it was that they gained from being slaves to sin and of which they were now ashamed.

To put it in our colloquial he is simply saying that you cannot have it both ways. You cannot be a slave, or servant, to two opposing things. You cannot be a servant of sin and at the same time a servant of righteousness. It must be one or the other.

He sums it up in his final statement. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We are in a position where we are encouraged to make a decision. We are free to choose sin, and we are free to choose righteousness. We are free to accept Jesus as being the Son of God. And we are free to respond like the people in his village who doubted his teaching. There is no doubt that the kingdom of God will survive without us. But will we survive without the Kingdom of God? When we wish to see the power of God it is certain that we will first believe that all things are possible when we make ourselves to be servants, or followers, of Christ.