



Sunday 10 June 2018 – Trinity 2
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Epistle 2 Corinthians 4:13-5.1, Gospel of St Mark 3:20-end
'Faithful Service'
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

The scene that unfolds in the Gospel depicts Jesus in the heart of his ministry. He is so mobbed by hordes of ordinary people that there is no time to eat. They cannot get enough of his wisdom and clamour for the grace of his miraculous powers to heal their afflictions.

His family, with concern, have been learning of his activities in the synagogues and around the countryside. Reports of his inflammatory comments levelled at the Pharisees have horrified them. Worse, some now say that he is deranged so, in desperation, his mother, brothers and sisters arrive to force him to desist and return home. It must have been grieving for Jesus to make his stand knowing that his actions were distressing to his mother: one of those swords piecing Mary's heart, as Simeon in the Temple had predicted so long before.

But, it is not just the ordinary people and his family who have gathered, so have 'the Scribes', as the Gospel calls them, who have come down from Jerusalem. The opposition of officialdom is mounting against Jesus but undaunted he presses his message home with what may be his harshest comment yet:

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven but is guilty of eternal sin."

This is chilling! After all isn't God's justice merciful? So, what is the foundation for Jesus' point? It's simply this, the Pharisees have become so entrenched in their warped interpretation of faith that white has become black and black white. They have lost spiritual humility feeling no shame or a need to repent. When standing before Jesus they fail to discern their sinfulness before his pure presence. Instead their blinded sight sees the face of evil personified rather than the face of the incarnate grace, holiness and love of God.

Jesus performs his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, which reveals God's truth and enables those who believe in him to recognise that truth when they see. The Pharisees believed in their own truth. We might all think how foolish they were and perhaps feel smug that we are not in their camp. I think, however, that Jesus' words which follow have an equal thrust for us today, when he said:

"Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

It's one thing to acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord but another to make effective use of our faith for the sake of others. The gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on us are to be used in his mission as he calls each one of individually. If we hoard our faith, as a personal, private privilege then we are in as grave a danger as the Pharisees who made their beliefs elitist.

How should we respond? St Paul in Corinthians urges us to stand firm and not be timid about sharing our faith or else the strident anti-faith lobby will use every opportunity to take a pop at us and, more to the point, take a stance against God. So, how do we protect and strengthen ourselves? I've said it before but it's worth repeating, to be strong in faith means putting effort into studying God's Holy Word and letting it inform us in the midst of our daily routine. We need to pray ardently for courage and strength to put this into purposeful action not wasting any opportunity God gives us.

Last week, we certainly made a stand or, as our former Rector Victor Collas said "We put more in." We were united together in good heart, which made for a strong example of purposeful, collaborative action. Granted, it was a fund raiser for the work of the Church but above all we welcomed everyone with warmth and Christian love in the name of the Church, which is Christ's body here on earth. It's good that our actions spoke so loudly. The challenge is to find yet more ways of growing this mission success which God has enabled: because, until the unchurched people grasp that their needs can be filled by Christ as their Saviour and daily friend then our work is not done. We want future generations to love this place, as we love it, as we sang in the Gradual hymn*, not because it is a mere building but because it is the place where we gather together to worship God our Father, our Saviour and the Sustainer of our faith.

St Paul knew all about such challenges. "Do not lose heart." he urged those early Christians and it is thanks to them and their witness that we are here today. Faithfulness works; let's bank on the Holy Spirit, so that as the last hymn says, we will be:

"Changed from glory into glory
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise." #

Amen

References

Gradual Hymn: *We love the place, O God,*
William Bullock (1798-1874), Henry W Baker (1821-1877)

Recessional Hymn *Love divine, all loves excelling,* Charles Wesley (1707-1788)