



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 29 August 2021 – Trinity 13
Readings: James 1: 17-end Mark: 7:1-8, 14-15
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Lightbulb moment

We possibly all have those moments, whilst chatting with someone, when we thought we knew what they were talking about but the more they continue we hope that a lightbulb moment will occur by the end of the conversation! Permit me to illustrate with a humorous example. My Irish grandmother was an MBE. Ah! You're thinking, she must have been in Northern Ireland. Nope! She was born and raised in Dublin to Southern Irish parents. Did my grandmother marry a Guernsey man? Yes. So, you say, was she awarded an MBE for good works here? No! She was awarded her MBE at birth. What, you're thinking! That's not possible. Yes, it is: she was named **Mary Blanche Elizabeth – MBE!**

Is cleanliness next to godliness?

Jesus, in his conversation with the Pharisees, was not having so much fun but rather hoping that the lightbulb moment would occur with them too. Once more Jesus faced criticism from them, this time on the issue of cleanliness. At first hearing the gospel with our knowledge of living with Covid, we might be thinking it's an exceedingly good thing to wash our hands – Dr Brink would approve. And, when I buy fruit and salad stuffs from the shop, I'll give that a wash too before I sink my teeth into it. Of course, the matter was not that simple. The washing the Pharisees were referring too was not on a point of hygiene but ceremonial cleanliness. The Jewish Law prescribed a specific way to let water run over one's hands. As for pots and pans, depending on whether they were made of metal or earthenware that too would dictate the type of ritual cleansing required. Inevitably, it was only the learned wealthy who had the leisure to deploy the rigorous regime, such that for the ordinary working man and housewife, it put purity beyond their reach and purity was synonymous with salvation, that's why Jesus wanted everyone to learn that salvation was achievable for all.

Stark truth

Jesus counters their criticism by quoting Isaiah 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts, as doctrines.' He then puts the boot in, 'You abandon the commandments of God and hold to human tradition.' Effectively, their ritual was more important than God's will. Faith, he infers should focus on who they worship not how they worship. Jesus explains it's the evil machinations that come out of hearts and minds that defile people not the by-product of

digested food or the absence of ritual niceties. This was a bitter pill for the Pharisees to swallow and, inevitably, most reject his words not acting on them.

Words in action

James, writing to the Jewish Christians scattered around the Roman Empire, is also giving important guidance in godly living. It would appear that their worship lacks appropriate action, when he says to them, “Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” It’s one thing to profess Christianity but quite another to put the words on our lips into practice. How we enact our faith in daily living depends on individual abilities. Words and actions, however, do need to work together otherwise faith becomes a sterile pastime that has no practical application.

Faith energy booster

What is the lightbulb moment to energise our doing? That really depends on our own personality and our calling to serve our faith. For me, each year, I like to spend a week on spiritual reflection kicking the tyres of my thoughts and actions. Hence, last week, I spent time doing so. You may prefer to do something practical in faith: all these are good. What is beneficial is to have a catalyst to help prime our individual thoughts and actions and James offers us just that. He says, ‘Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.’ So, this is the lightbulb moment we need: all that we have in life, whether material gifts, joyful experiences or spiritual insights, are a gift and if a gift, then there is a giver. The giver is God, our Father of lights, who enlightens every heart and mind, when we allow ourselves to be open to his living Word. In opening ourselves to his light we recognise that all of his gifts are good, real, perfect and transforming, when compared to our baser human instincts. Once we recognise the gift of life that God offers us, our worship is, as James says, ‘Pure and undefiled before God.’

Question: Who, or what is energising our worship?

Amen