



Sunday, 17 March 2019 – 2nd Sunday of Lent
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18 & Gospel of St Luke 13: 31-end
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Two contrasting perspectives

Earlier we heard two contrasting Bible readings. In the Gospel there were the self-assured, Jerusalem-based Pharisees. But, in Genesis, there was Abraham the unassuming nomadic tent-dwelling man who, at the age of 75, had been directed by God to leave his family home for ever and journey into unknown territory. Although, Abraham had no legitimate heir God assured him that he would become the father of a multitude. Abraham believed and set out in faith and, we're told, 'God reckoned it to him as righteousness.' How many of us would trust God to that extent?

Sense-checking promises

After a time in the wilderness Abraham sense-checks what God had promised. "Where Lord, is my promised heir?" Directing Abraham to look at the multitude of stars in the sky God uses this as a sign of encouragement also the promise of a permanent home and pastureland the size of a kingdom is guaranteed without God asking Abraham for anything in return except that he trusts him.

Familiarity breeds contempt

The Pharisees, by contrast, have been settled in the city of Jerusalem not merely by birth but by heritage for generations. They have all the security of a fixed abode. They have the prestige of the Temple in Jerusalem. They're well connected for, we heard, that they are in communication with King Herod. We will also be reminded, as our Lent readings progress, that they have a conduit through to the head of the Roman occupying forces, Pontius Pilate himself. In theory, they have everything going for them except that unlike Abraham who trusts God implicitly, they doubt.

Scheming v tenacity

Although they've been drawn to Jesus like iron filings to a magnet, they are uncomfortable in his presence. The way that Jesus puts faith into action in an engaging, everyday way, is so contrary to the structured exercise of religion that they have been brought up to practice. One can't help but wonder if it is them that has stirred up Herod in an attempt to alarm Jesus hoping that he will flee. "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Jesus isn't fazed by them and instead patiently states the facts. "Tell Herod what you see me doing "I'm performing miracles and I will do so until my work is finished. Any attempt to deflect me is pointless." Jesus is, fully in control of the situation and even predicts that he knows they intend to have

him killed, just as the prophets of former times had received a similar fate for speaking God's truth to his people.

Inconvenient truth

If Jesus had merely prophesied the future, most people would have ignored him, there would have been room for doubt that it would ever happen. The troubling thing with prophecy is not so much foretelling the future but being forthright about the here and now. Prophets have a habit of stating the inconvenient truth about what's wrong with our relationship with each other and, more worryingly, what's wrong with our relationship with God. The truth is uncomfortable hearing because in our hearts we find the evidence that condemns us. Despite the Pharisees hostility towards him, Jesus says how he would dearly love to gather them and all Jerusalem into his arms to guide and protect them just as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, but, his final indictment, "You were not willing!"

Healthy relationship with God

What do we take from these readings? Abraham illustrates a healthy relationship with God, demonstrating that we are not programmed like robots to act in a predictable way. God allows us the freedom to question him. Abraham, though facing challenge, trusted God because he never stopped talking to him in prayer. We too face challenges here at St Andrew's, both of sufficient numbers and money. What's to be done about it? Through our Mission Action Plan we aim to grow our numbers. How? The key lesson to learn from Abraham is that growing needs to start with deeper discipleship. There is much we can do to engage more deeply and determinedly with God through our Church and unlike some other Christians we will not be persecuted for it. That freedom, however, can become a threat if, like the Pharisees we treat God too lightly. Few of us, myself included, come together regularly in the week to pray to God asking him for his direction for our church: this is key to growth. Outreach begins from within. Are our hearts aflame for Christ?

Action point

I've challenged myself to put my words into action to start praying here once a month on a Friday at 9.15, for 15 minutes. I'm open to ideas if you can join me and, until we have better hospitality facilities in church, we could all go for coffee after at The Mint. "15 Minutes & Mint". The more we draw together, the more in tune with Christ's mission we will become. I'll be praying for you; but here's an invitation, will you join me?

Amen.