



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 26th September 2021 – Trinity 17
Readings: James 5: 13-end, St Mark 9 38-end
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

No mixed messages

There are people who are skilled in blurring messages take for instance in the TV series 'Yes, Prime Minister' and Sir Humphry Appleby, the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Administrative Affairs, who is the complete master of long-winded assertions and declarations utterly bewildering Prime Minister Jim Hacker. By contrast, James in his Epistle writing to the Jewish Christians dispersed around the Roman Empire does not mince his words, they are succinctly direct:

- Are you suffering – you should pray!
- Are you cheerful – you should sing songs of praise!
- Are you sick – call the elders and have them pray over you anointing with holy oil in the Lord's name!

Elijah was human just like you but when he prayed God stopped it raining for 3 ½ years and then when Elijah prayed for rain God sent it in torrents! James is implying stop bleating and start putting your faith into action!

There's no so blind as them that won't see ...

We don't get any let up in the Gospel either as we plunge into the midst of the disciples and find Jesus in an equally serious mood. If your hand, foot or eye causes you to stumble cut them off or pluck them out! Jesus and James are clearly frustrated about the lack of attention that their words of instruction and wisdom receive. Jesus has just told his disciples in the very same conversation, which we read last week, that he will be betrayed into human hands and be killed and yet, the disciples still don't grasp their part in continuing his mission. Why they even tried to stop someone from casting out demons in Jesus' name thinking that only Jesus should perform miracles. You can hear the sigh in Jesus' words when he says 'Whoever is not against us, is for us. In other words, do the same and encourage those who do my work. But if you hinder anyone who believes in me, be warned! It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea or have the part of you that offended cut off.' Stern stuff! How often do we demand someone acts on such a directive or to pray so fervently? Would that be because we know we lack the spiritual stamina too?

Wake up and smell the coffee!

So how do we apply these readings to our faith today? We all know what it's like to be the recipient of false accusations or treated contemptuously, as though lesser mortals. But, if we do likewise, we will be judged accordingly. Our faith needs to steer us on the right

course to mitigate against our natural human instincts. The firmer we hold to the correct path gradually this will show in good works to benefit others swelling collectively to a torrent of good works done in Christ's name. What's the cure? As always, Jesus gives us something that we can understand. Salt! We know the benefit of adding salt to food, it enhances the flavour. In spiritual terms we need to apply salt to our learning as this will enhance our understanding the better to share it with others. But if we consign our spiritual salt to the dank cellar of our hearts and minds, it will become solid and useless and fit for nothing. Unlike shop bought salt that depletes as we use it, spiritual salt multiplies the more we season our souls. Salt also has another quality: it makes us thirsty. Drinking water helps us to absorb nutrients that are seasoned.

Where hope grows miracles happen

How does this play out in our world today? The demands our Christian faith can make of us may at times seem unachievable, when so much is wrong in society and a number of people deny God's existence: and yet, there are others who give hope. Jesus says whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. God is so merciful compared to our judgemental world. Small kindnesses collectively can make a massive difference globally. From small spiritual beginnings, miracles happen. To join the dots, therefore, of today's readings with those of last week, reflecting on Jesus' prediction of his betrayal and subsequent death on the cross, he said, 'I thirst'. Offering a cup of water doesn't sound much and yet, we know just how far a cup of water can travel if poured out on a flat surface. What spiritual cup of water can we offer to others to help quench their thirst and need of Christ in the world today?

Amen