

Head and Heart

3rd March 2024 The Third Sunday in Lent

Readings

Exodus 20: 1- 17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1: 18 - 25

John 2: 13 - 22



Powerful Simplicity

The gospel story of Jesus causing havoc in the Temple has, in recent times, been used to speak about '*the angry Christ*'. Perhaps we all know him in different ways! I can understand it, maybe in the light of church experiences, as frustration needing to express itself! I must add, I have never thrown church furniture about or scattered the contents of a collection plate. I went home and dug the garden! What Jesus' action in the Temple was about was him expressing his Father's view of the conflicting legalistic, restrictive attitudes common to religion and life, which were so loved by most teachers of the Law. It was their same glad intolerance on another occasion which saw them dragging an adulterous woman through the Women's Court to have her condemned. The man involved does not appear to be represented in their court of judgement. (*John 8*).

The importance of today's reading is in that it illustrates the major conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities which eventually took him to the Cross. The incidences of such conflict occur often throughout Jesus' ministry. The same battles have also occurred in the church from its earliest days and with similar dire consequences. But that's for another time.

Jesus would, of course, have attended the synagogue school in Nazareth where he would learn of the Law and the prophets as we read them in the Bible still today. Probably at home too, he would question his mother and priestly grandfather, Joachim about their meaning. He would have been taught to recite the great commandments given to Moses for God's people. Our Old Testament reading recalls them for us. At one time we would have seen these -*The Ten Commandments* - on boards and wall-hangings in most parish churches, ready to be recited at worship services. They were God's guidelines for a new nation, giving its people instructions for moral and social living. The key to them is in the first commandment. God alone is the source of the laws as he is of the strength to live by them.

Jesus, like all his people would have learned the resume of them (*Deuteronomy 6:4*) - which he repeated to a questioning lawyer (*Matthew 12:28*) who asked him which was the greatest commandment - *Love the Lord you God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself.*'

Sadly, as with most wonderful and beautiful things, corruption was waiting in the wings. Future leaders of religion and state would devise interpretations of the Law which gave them power and laid fearful, crippling obligations on humble people.

Jesus would have studied the prophets in synagogue and at home, reading of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and others who all heard the Lord saying, *I don't want your sacrifices and burdensome rituals. I want your love from a contrite heart. I want you to live the best life – the life for which I created you.* We do that by following his ways of love and then the Law makes sense, however difficult it may be to keep it. However often we have to come back to the Lord saying *Sorry!* and knowing more of his forgiving love.

I'm reminded of G.K. Chesterton's famous saying, *The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and never tried.* That is the theme of Paul's words for today. It all sounds so impossibly simple to say, 'save the world by putting God first, loving in every aspect of living, and showing the same love for everyone else.' Many of us consider ourselves too clever for that. We need to know which books and podcasts to study first, or we are just amused at our picture of God as being foolishly childlike. But then, God did become a child, in Jesus, who by his life and teaching fulfilled and expanded the laws of love (*Matthew 5.17*).

In his words to Christians at Corinth, Paul takes this truth further. Our salvation – our new eternal being in God – has been assured for us by means of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. That salvation which may be claimed by faith in him as our personal living saviour – Jesus. Faith!! Simply difficult!! But possible for all from the youngest child to the most aged senior!

The city of Corinth was full of wise philosophers and pagan theologians. For the Jews among them it was obscene to talk of divinity being publicly crucified. Many other people laughed at the ridiculous notions of living by faith and love. However, in that city and in thousands of other places since, people of all ages and ability have reached out hearts and hands to trust in Jesus and prove the power of His Law to transform their lives, and their world.

A Prayer based on Psalm 19

Lord God, many mornings I watch the sunrise.
Many nights I stand to let the moonlight make a path to my feet.
I marvel at these constant reminders of your grace,
in the meetings and happenings of every night and day.
Even more I am conscious of this universe and
of your creative powers throughout it.
I am mindful of your laws governing even the smallest elements of life.
I am grateful for your laws for living, made clear in Jesus.
They make a life of peace and purpose for me as I trust in you.
Lord, when it's all too much to comprehend,
give me deeper faith in you,
and an ever-expanding love for you.

