

Sunday Thought

19th September 2021 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Proverbs 31: 10 - 31

Psalm 1

James 3: 13 – 4:3,7 – 8a

Mark 9: 30 - 37

Believe it? Live it!

Today's scriptures give us illustrations of what makes Christian life distinctive. James writes to churches everywhere. Many of them had by then become well established in communities which were fundamentally very similar to those of most times – and ours. He is concerned that the accepted cultural and current religious practices of their surrounding societies were creeping into the lives of Christ's people. They were proud to possess wisdom from the scriptures and the words of Jesus which made them different to much of the life around them. They were assured they had a wisdom which was from God. James speaks then to Christians in general when he writes, *'You may have scriptural wisdom, but it doesn't stop you being jealous, bitter, disorderly and selfish in your relationships. You may think you are wise in following God's way and being different to – or is it 'better than'- those outside your fellowships. If that is true, then prove it. Live the life which the really wise among you will recognise as being pure, peaceable, gentle, friendly, compassionate, actively generous and free from hypocrisy. Show that your way of life has been planted in you through your walk with Christ, the Prince of Peace'. Wow!*



Our readings give us two other images of God's Kingdom-living. The picture of a capable wife, at the end of the book of Proverbs, was obviously composed by a man. I wonder what himself did with his time? The illustration was not intended to give every married woman thereafter a phobia of inadequacy! It was a picture of *wisdom* for all, giving us a secure, happy and successful way of life. It is, therefore, another

reminder of what is involved in living the Kingdom-life. Let's not worry about the daily routine of this remarkable woman as wife, mother, homemaker, gardener, and business associate, but rather, think about her happily doing good, not seeking praise but quietly drawing confidence and respect from everyone who knew her. Ideals? Yes but worth aiming for by all the family. It is not her accomplishments which make her distinctive but her Christlike nature.

The other illustration comes from the Gospel for today. It's of a child. A little boy. Could it have been a girl? Jesus has been speaking to his disciples again about what is soon to happen to him and them. They still do not understand it all, except that it will end with his death, yet they had great hopes. Hadn't he added, *I will rise to life again*? They were still clinging to their dreams of the earthly Kingdom of God being established – dreams of a bright new world without cruelty of inhumane wars, hunger, poverty, of peaceful communities no longer under occupation and taxation by Rome. Jesus would be accepted as the Christ and become the leader of restless multitudes who flocked to them. Important positions would be given to those closest to him, like themselves. We know that could only be a dream which not all of them really accepted but they were living in the realm of miracles, and they had that gift which Jesus called *mustard-seed* faith. Some of them imagined life as 'officers' of The Kingdom of God.

Aware of their thinking, Jesus takes them back to previous discipleship lessons. *'If you wish to have positions in the Kingdom of God [and the church] you will have to give up notions of power, authority, force of command... You will need to learn the role of a servant and the art of foot-washing!* At that point he called one of the children who were always there with the crowd. It is one of my favourite scenes in the New Testament. Jesus – God incarnate – standing a little child in front of him, encircling him in his arms and saying, *'this is how we rule the Father's world! You will become leaders, teachers, writers of words to be read two thousand years from now but first you must learn how Kingdom-life is the way of childlike trust, love and kindness, forgetting your squabbles almost as soon as the last word is spoken*

We have these pictures of life in the Kingdom. Our lives are not expected to be exact copies, but we too must learn the way of peaceable wisdom, gracious service and childlike trust. Then I hear James add – *'If we believe it, let's live it in the strength of Jesus who called us.'*

A Prayer [with Psalm 1 in mind]

Lord, we long for a world of happiness.
It begins with us, finding our true selves and
living the way of your Kingdom,
Like willows draped over flowing waters,
green in the driest summer,
branches bending with gales,
leaves singing in the wind:
Safe havens, bright yellow-green when Spring returns,
always sustained by waters which never run dry.

