

Sermon Sunday 20 February 2022

“C’s get degrees.” “If I get 51% I have put too much effort in.” You may or may not be familiar with these phrases. I am certain that these phrases are not limited to nursing students. Such attitudes may be acceptable in some jobs or professions. I challenge the nursing students with the thought, is aiming for 50% enough? Perhaps they see such attitudes as okay in approaching assessments. This is often where these attitudes begin. I ask the following. If I am your patient, is 50% care adequate? Which parts of me get washed and more importantly, which 50% of me misses out? What if I get 50% of my medications, which ones do I miss out on? What if it is your loved one who is receiving the care? So, I ask the students again, is 50% enough as a nurse? I think this does get them thinking, at least for a little while anyway. The facial expression on some individuals is extraordinary! This makes for interesting conversation in the classroom or during clinical placement.

As Lecturers we have an assessment outline with the requirements the students are required to write to. We also have an assessment rubric. It is the rubric that guides our marking of the assessments. The rubric generally has five columns: exemplary, accomplished, satisfactory, developing, beginning or A, B, C, D, or E grade. When we mark we start at 100% and work from there using that rubric as our guide. I encourage the students to look toward at least the accomplished level rather than simply aiming for satisfactory or 50%.

What does God expect from us as Christians? Does God rate our performance as Christians? The expectations and standards are different to those in the world. When we read those expectations or hear them this morning, they might appear simple on the surface. But more than lip service is expected. The rubric in our heart is our covenant with God. We are called to live in God’s realm in accord with God’s character and the power is there for us to do it.

The expectations are made clear although they may be challenging and take us way out of our comfort zone. They may unnerve us or make us wriggle. I am certain that we have all met and worked with people who challenge us for whatever reason.... maybe we don't even like them very much. Perhaps we don't get the opportunity to avoid them, nor should we.

The invitation, if you like, the expectation, is to love our enemies, do good to all, bless everyone, pray for others and..... not to judge. We are to turn the other cheek, to give. Do to others as we would have them do to us. All of this is regardless of the recipient's response. Loving, lending, doing good, equals generosity.

Aiming for 50% we will love those who love us, do good to those who are good to us, lend to those we know will repay us. Where is the challenge in that approach? We are in a covenant with God, a God who is merciful, He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. We are expected to do likewise in meeting the expectations of that covenant with God. The expectations are to love our enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back. No one said it would be easy! We are called to live in God's realm: to be caught up, healed, to lose hostile spirits.... to receive and live mercy.

These are standards that are radically different to those in the world. We are offered a world that is very different to the one we know. Jesus begins to describe the way in which those who are in the covenantal relationship with God are called to live. The power will level the playing field no matter what rules we have established to create and protect our positions. Jesus lists a number of plural crucial elements that describe behaviour for those who have not been put off and who are still listening. Certainly, we are supposed to be disconcerted by them, astonished at them, deeply challenged by them.

We might say that we are pushed out of our comfort zone, we are challenged to be different in the world, in the community, in our families. We are reminded that we do not do this alone. In Genesis chapter 45: God's overarching sovereignty was recognised by Joseph. Despite the sins of His people, God of the Covenant sovereignly acted to carry out his plan. The harm done by his brothers was actually part of God's bigger plan to save many lives—has both dangers and benefits.

In terms of its harmful consequences, a theology like this has been, and continues to be, used by those who see the slaughter and enslavement of millions as part of the larger plan from God to spread the gospel and save souls. One apparent danger of this theology is how it implicates God as a cause of extreme suffering and seems to justify something as inhumane as slavery. In terms of the benefits of Joseph's theology, one can see that it allows Joseph to have a non-violent interaction with his brothers who harmed him. But instead of **only** focusing on the harm that the brothers intended and caused, Joseph transitions to asserting God's role: "it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Genesis 45:5; see also verse 7). By framing his brothers' harmful actions within the larger program of God's redemptive work, Joseph charts a different path from their expectations.

This is not simply a matter of living according to rules though. It is the law of the Spirit, the law of charity. It is to have Jesus' mind in us. Today's Gospel gives us a privileged window into the mind of Jesus. We should aim for exemplary behaviour. That is not to say that we achieve it but we should aim for it. We are expected to give of our very best.

Do not judge and we will not be judged. Do not condemn and we will not be condemned. Forgive and we will be forgiven. Again, it sounds simple on the surface. We are called to walk the talk, where actions speak louder than words. To be seen to do and provide an example in the world, as example for others as Christ provided the example for us. To have the mind of Jesus in each of us.

Tom Wright shares the following story:

One of the greatest Jewish scholars to write about Jesus in the modern age was David Flusser, who taught for many years at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. But not everyone approved of his scholarship; and one of his most brilliant students, visiting a university elsewhere, was once given a very low mark by the professor simply because of being associated with Flusser himself. Then, sometime later, a student of that other professor came to study with Flusser. His work was not very good, but Flusser insisted on grading it with an 'A.' His teaching assistant protested: how could he do that, particularly after what the other professor had done? 'Give him an A,' insisted Flusser. "This I have learned from Jesus."

Think of the best thing that you can do for the worst person and go ahead and do it. Think of something you would like someone to do for you and do it for them. Think of the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty and lavish generosity on them instead. We are reminded that the measure that we use, it will be measured to us. This is about new life bursting out energetically, like flowers growing through concrete and startling everyone with their vigour and colour.

The measure that we used will be returned to us. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into our lap. A level playing field, for the deserving and the undeserving. We are called to be merciful as God is merciful. Only when we discover that this is the sort of God that we are dealing with will we have any chance of making this way of life our own.

In order to gain such gifts, that is, to have life in its fullness, to inherit eternal joy, to have a place forever in heaven, we are invited to become Christ-like in our attitudes and in our behaviour. This is not for utilitarian motives. It's not merely in order, as it were, to make the world a better place. No, Jesus invites us to be like him because that is supremely for our own good. It makes it a level playing field

and makes us fit for his company, and prepares us in the best possible way to receive the super-abundant gifts he wants to give us.

The purpose of reading today's Gospel is not to make us feel guilty, but to inspire us to be the very best and to give our very best, and to re-kindle our desire for the Kingdom. Being satisfactory is not enough. We have to aspire to exemplary, not outwardly but inwardly in our deepest desire to be like Christ. We who belong to Christ are reminded today that our deepest desire really is for that holiness to which He calls us. We are here now to express and nourish that desire by coming to Jesus in the holy Eucharist. Ultimately, the reward is not an 'A' grade as the world understands it but we are promised is Christ Himself; the gift Christ makes of Himself. Living further into the likeness and image of God is itself the reward! To have the mind of Jesus in us.

It is not our neighbour with whom we must compare ourselves, we may well stand that comparison very adequately. It is God with whom we must compare ourselves. We are called to be like God. We might think, I can never attain that level. We treat others as we ourselves would like to, or expect to be treated..... the deserving and the undeserving alike.

Some robbers once came upon a hermit's cave and said, "We've come to take everything out of your cave". The hermit said, "Take whatever you see, my sons." So they took what they found in the cave, and went away. But they missed a little bag that was hidden in a corner. The hermit picked it up, and ran after them, shouting, "My sons, you missed this; take it." They were amazed at his patience and restored everything, and asked for forgiveness. They said to each other, "This really is a man of God." This story is adapted from the desert fathers, set in 4th century Egypt, exemplifies faithfulness to the words of Jesus. We find it

delightful, and it makes us smile. We smile because although we find this hermit utterly admirable, it would never occur to us to imitate him.

Loving, lending, doing good = generosity. Having the mind of Jesus in each of us, where actions speak louder than words. How would God rate us as Christians?

AMEN