

A Time of Becoming.

I am hoping to take you all on a short journey today. My sermon will be short. The content will be crunchy. I will attempt to avoid the problem of drowning in the detail by avoiding an excessive focus on the detail in each of the Gospel stories.

At first glance, our gospel for today, seems to be a barely disguised attempt on the part of James and John, to score points and prestige. They seem to imagine that if they can secure seats at the top table, things will be cruisy for them.

Sadly, they have things completely upside down.

To see this more clearly however, and to get a better idea about what is being asked of us, we need to get a bigger picture. To do this we first need to go back to the Gospel readings over the last three weeks.

Sometimes it is helpful to get a better view of things, by standing back a bit. Often when I am trying find a place by using GPS, (I use Google Maps) I type in the place I want, only to find that the pin (as they call it) is at the centre of a highly magnified part of the map. As a result, I really don't fully know where the place is. If however, I zoom out a distance, then every thing changes. I can see much more and the relationship of one place to another is more clearly seen.

I often have the same problem with books. I once brought a book entitled, "Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburgers" The cover of the book and it's title, set off a significant learning event for me. Sadly, when it came to reading it, the author had overdone his explanation of the title by expanding his thought through twelve odd chapters. The effect was an overload of detail. I simply wanted to get back to the title. That was far more provocative for me.

Sometimes getting at what the evangelists are trying to tell us gets us caught in the same detail trap. Today's Gospel standing alone, can be a bit confusing. Yes, we can bring meaning to bear from within our culture, but more importantly the evangelists wanted us to grasp an overall theme. That theme is better revealed when we stand back a little and try to discern a meaning by realizing that a central theme is running through our reading.

Thus, looking for a pattern by viewing the Gospel themes over the last four weeks, will shift from an image of top table idolatry, (today's Gospel) and into a generalised topic of the attitudes we should embrace. The big question is, will we see that or are we in danger of being overwhelmed by excessive detail.

Follow me then, as I slice through the detail, in search of the theme the I believe the evangelist wanted us to see.

On September the 29th, the Gospel said, among other things:

- 1 For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me.

The focus for the outcome is not on the person who 'does' this miracle, but on the community in which it is witnessed.

- 2 If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

Once again it is a community focus

The focus of our attention as we journey is all about other people, not ourselves. We are called to reach into each others lives with healing and neighbourly love.

In short, other people matter. The big story is about our lives in community!

On October the 6th we heard Jesus saying:

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away. It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

One needs to be very cautious here, because the cultural norms in the West are very different to what they are in the East. Jesus insisted, "I have come to fulfil the law, not to do away with it."

In short, relationships matter.

October the 13th.

We are confronted by the hyperbole that talks of a Camel passing through the eye of a needle. We learn that wealth is not in fact the sole reason prevents a person from entering heaven. It is rather the importance or priority that is given to it. If a man's wealth is more important to him the practice and expression of his faith, then he is doomed. He cannot love both God and Mammon.

October 20th.

Now James and John want a seat at the top table. The inference is that in some way, they rank more highly than others. By inference they would be people who no longer serve. From this point in their lives, they would be expect to be served by lesser mortals than them.

In short, their attitudes are more about arrogance than humility.

If you can glimpse an overview in these four readings, you might perhaps understand why I found myself singing a well know hymn. This piece of sacred writing (the Hymn) was known to Paul when he was penning his letter to the Philippians. The name of the hymn is 'Carman Christie' and it is well known to many of us.

Philippians 2:1-11

- 1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
- 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.
- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

- 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And there it is. Too many more words might risk drowning in detail. I have already said that it is the theme I hope you will see. Not the detail.

To embrace the words of a very modern writer, let me offer this delightful drop of wisdom.

Do things for people, not because of who they are, or what they do in return, but because of who you are.

Winnie the Poo

Ross Twenty-ninth Sunday in ordinary time 2024