

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In our gospel reading today, the “them” that Jesus is answering are the Jews who were outraged that Jesus had healed a man by telling him to stand up, take his mat, and walk. This man has been lying waiting to be healed for 38 years, so it is safe to assume that he was instantly recognizable. When the Jews saw him walking around and carrying his mat, they don’t praise God for His miraculous healing, restoring the man’s legs, balance and upper body strength, they tell him off for carrying his mat on the Sabbath! You couldn’t make this up

So the Jews are most seriously displeased, when Jesus adds fuel to the fire by telling them “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” We understand that the Jews objected to Jesus calling God “My Father” because that made Jesus divine and equal to God, which the Jews found blasphemous, but when Jesus tells them “My Father is still working” he is saying that God works on the Sabbath, too. This hit at the bedrock of their faith. Although Genesis 2,2 – 3, teaches that God rested on the 7th day, the Rabbis held that God continually upholds the Universe, that is, God is working all the time, yet He does this without breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus is facing people upset enough to consider putting Him to death, and when we read this passage today it seems as if Jesus is just making things worse. We must remember that “How to make friends and influence people” is not going to be published for another 1, 936 years!

Jesus outlines His purpose on Earth, and pleasing the Jews does not make it onto the list. Jesus is the Son of God, God works on the Sabbath, God the Father loves God the Son, and God has given all judgement to Jesus, verse 23 “so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son, does

not honour the Father who sent him.” Jesus is telling the Jews that although they sincerely believe they are worshipping and honouring God, they are mistaken, because if they truly knew the Father, they would honour the Son, who is here on the Father’s business. This is meaty stuff.

Jesus would know Proverbs, 15 v 1 “A soft word turns away wrath, but a hard word stirs up anger” but He does not attempt to placate them, to re-assure them, to say anything other than the Truth. The Jews, who believe themselves to be spiritually superior to others, are, in fact, in a perilous spiritual position. God has given Jesus “all judgement.” This is very hard hitting. In v. 24, Jesus tells them “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life.” The Jews aren’t currently qualifying for eternal life. Because they have not had “ears to hear” they will face Christ’s judgement. Verse 29 “those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.” This isn’t salvation by works, but rather true faith leads a person performing good works, and the lack of good works in a person’s life demonstrates the lack of true faith.

So what is Jesus saying to us? To carry out His will always, whether or not this is a popular choice, to speak the Truth always to all peoples. To be open to the idea that there may be aspects of our faith that we may like and find comforting, but they are man-made rather than God spoken. The Rabbis believed God worked constantly, keeping the Universe spinning, but that God never broke the Sabbath whilst doing so. In the new post-Covid world, we may have to change or abandon some traditions we have held in deep reverence. We may have to ask ourselves whether we worship God, or the Church of England. Don’t expect it to be comfortable.

We have had several weeks where our gospel readings have been showing us examples of unanswered prayer, and this week our gospel reading shows us people expecting their religion to be comfortable. When confronted by a man miraculously healed on the Sabbath, their attitude isn’t Don’t Perform Miraculous Healings, their attitude is Not

today, thank You! They will accept the miracle, but on their terms only. And God is showing them their error.

Hands up anyone who likes being told they are wrong? It affects our pride; we don't like to hear it.

Hands up anyone who likes being told they are securely loved for all eternity and Christ has taken all their sins away, every single last one of them, and in Christ we are new creations? Hands down, thanks, that's comforting and re-assuring and gives us a warm fuzzy feeling, we like to hear that.

The English Standard Version of 2 Corinthians 5, v 17 says "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away: behold, the new has come." That is a comforting thought, we are not improved versions of ourselves, Christ does not make us "better" He makes us completely new, a new creation.

So as we, as new creations, live out our faith in the post-Covid world, we will find that things have changed. That is quite alright, they are meant to. As Jesus Himself says in Luke 17, v 32 "Remember Lot's wife!" and let us not look back to the past that we were so used to, but let us look forward to the future promised in Revelations 21, v,5 "He who was seated on the throne said "I am making everything new!"

Amen.