

Luke 11, 29-32

24<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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

Imagine being in the crowd surrounding Jesus, and hearing Him say, “This generation is an evil generation.” Not easy to hear, so what can we learn from it? The crowds were asking for a sign, some supernatural eye-popping extravaganza that would give them something to talk about for the rest of their lives. They didn’t get it. And they did not get it, because they asked amiss James ch 4 v 3 tells us “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” They wanted entertainment, and valued spectacle over salvation.

This is no time for parables. Jesus talks to them in terms they will understand. He mentions Jonah, a minor prophet so famous for being swallowed by a whale that we miss the fact that he is the only prophet who refused point-blank to obey God and actually legged it in the opposite direction. When Jonah eventually obeyed God, the people of Nineveh repented and were saved.

Jesus mentions “the queen of the south.” Bathsheba in all her royal splendor sought out Solomon because she realized his wisdom was God-given. Both the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba were foreigners, and they understood the power and wisdom of God far better than the Jews themselves. The Jews believed all foreigners and non-Jews were socially and spiritually inferior to themselves. God sees things differently. Jesus tells them twice “Something greater is here” Jesus tells them that not only are they not going to get a sign, they are in the wrong for wanting and asking for one, and to add insult to injury, those whom they consider their inferiors will be judging THEM on the Day of Judgement! Outrageous, Jesus did not tell them their “inferiors” were their equals, their so-called inferiors were vastly superior to them by their own standards, the way a judge has an elevated social standing compared to the accused, standing in the dock.

We heard last Wednesday in our gospel reading, of people coming to Christ and going away un-satisfied. It seems that a lot of people have this experience. However, nowhere in the Bible is it suggested that this is a one-time offer, as some pushy double glazing salesman may try to coerce us. We know that “God wills all men be saved” and Lamentations 3, 22-23 tells us “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness” and as we go further in our walk with Jesus, there will be times when we hit a roadblock in life and we get closer to Jesus and everything works out well. Our troubles melt like snow on a glorious summer’s day and the melting snow waters another part of our lives and everything makes sense and everything is beautiful and God is good, all the time.

And there are going to be other times. When life hits us with a brickbat when we would prefer a bouquet and one worry brings ten more in its wake and we get closer to Jesus, who promises us “I will not fail or forsake you.” Which is Hebrews 13, v5. And the whole terrifying tsunami of our life continues unabated but for the knowledge that Christ is walking with us, which is pretty spectacular, but..... you know, we can be honest when we are talking to Jesus. God made us, God loves us, He knows us better than we know ourselves, God is not a man, which is Numbers 23 v 19, He is not going to storm off in a huff when we speak from our heart, while we may surprise ourselves, the things we come out with, we are never going to surprise God and He loves us, just the same. John 4, v 24 tells us, “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth”. And in truth we can say to Jesus, “Thank You for being with me. It’s an amazing honour to have You in my life and part of me struggles to believe that You want to be part of my hum drum life and my sometimes annoying family and I love You, Lord. And part of me is cross with You because You haven’t taken away the problems that have me pacing the floor in the small hours and You haven’t changed the situations and experiences that I am finding really hard to cope with right now. Amen.”

That is gritty realism. From Jesus to man, when He tells the Jews that He is not a performing monkey and they are wrong to ask for a sign, and from us to Jesus when we speak from our heart, whatever (to us) shocking and unacceptable things we find there.

And gritty realism is where we are now. This isn't our first interregnum, that is not the scary part. Our Church family is going to double in size overnight, and the majority of our brothers and sisters we have not even met yet. That is scary and exciting in equal measure. Because of Covid, we cannot arrange a get-together. That is frustrating.

What is God telling us in this passage? What does He want us to know, and to do? The Jews thought they were pretty special, and Jesus told them they weren't. God loves the Jews, God loves the Arabs equally. He loves all of His creation. God loves each and every one of us at St John the Apostle, God loves each and every one of the congregation at All Saints. Romans 12, v 5 New International Version, "so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." God is telling us He does not want any "them and us" thinking, because we are one.

We can certainly pray for wisdom, because wisdom is something we will use in the service of others, but God does not want us to pray for a sign, because of what a sign represents. It shows that God is not in His rightful place in our lives, that we view Him as some kind of celestial vending machine, and He has to give us what we ask for, because He serves us, rather than we serving Him. Also, the Jews were asking for a sign but they had already received one in Jonah, so they did not recognize what God was doing. We can pray for discernment to recognize what God is doing and where He wants us to go, and then follow.

When James warns us about asking amiss, "that you may consume it on your lusts" lust does not only have a sexual meaning, it means a strong desire for anything, we can talk about a lust for power, we don't usually talk about a lust for cream cake, but that is an accurate

use of the word, in describing a strong craving. And we can experience lust in our wanting for things to be how they used to be. In the good old days of St. John's when Fr. Pick-your-favourite was in charge. When we had a full choir, when we had a bell-tower, when we had a church hall, and so on. Remembering is not a sin. God gives us our memories to use for His glory. Where we can go amiss is in wanting, craving almost, for our worship styles to remain unchanged because we like them, for us not to have to change in any way, (because we are right and they are wrong, they are the ones to change) for us to always stay within our comfort zones. When we catch ourselves doing this, we can have a hearty chuckle at ourselves for being so human, and go to God and say, "OK Lord, I have told You what I want, now You tell me what You want."

And to say with Samuel, in 1 Samuel 3, v 10," Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Amen.