**16th August Reading Reflection and Prayers Trinity 10**

**Reading**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew 15.10-28

Glory to you, O Lord.

10Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, ‘Listen and understand: 11it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.’ 12Then the disciples approached and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?’ 13He answered, ‘Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.’ 15But Peter said to him, ‘Explain this parable to us.’ 16Then he said, ‘Are you also still without understanding? 17Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? 18But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. 19For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. 20These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.’

21Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22A Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’ 23But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.’ 24He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ 25But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ 26He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.’ 27She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ 28Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.‘ And her daughter was healed instantly.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

**Reflection**

“It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles”, says Jesus. Moments later we read the same Jesus saying “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” referring to a woman in real need, who comes with great courage and hope that this Messiah, this great man could give her hope for a better future. Was this not Jesus’ mouth defiling? Is this not a cruel and thoughtless response from the loving caring leader we follow?

Reponses from theologians over the years has differed on this text. From those who believe Jesus did not mean this, he was joking with the woman, to those who prefer to ignore his words to focus on how the “foreigner” could see his power despite not being one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Or to remind us that persistence in prayer is to be encouraged! These extremes miss some important points.

First if Jesus is human, then he will make mistakes, sometime hurt people and he will have to learn to admit when he gets things wrong and try to put it right. We see this happening in this story when the woman boldly challenges him. If we cannot allow ‘our Jesus’ to get something wrong, are we not denying his humanity?

Secondly the woman’s “bold challenge” gives us a template for how to respond to God. We do not have to hide behind piety or fear, but we can speak freely about our feelings, our disappointment or anger. Surely this is a much healthier way to be in relationship with God than to attempt to hide our true feelings from the almighty all knowing and all powerful God?

So on one hand we are told what comes out of the mouth defiles, and on the other hand we are to understand that being challenging and not accepting what others offer when this is not want is needed or wanted is OK.

The challenge is the context and the intent. The woman challenges Jesus not for herself but her child, she is not trying to win a fight, or to put Jesus ‘in his place’ (!) but she is the voice for the weak and the needy, she is the one who stands for the person who use their own voice.

One of the things I have experienced in the Cornish communities is sometimes I have felt defiled by words that have come out of mouths, often by church members. How quick we are to complain and how quick to anger too. It is a great sadness to hear from folk how hurt they have been by what has been said or gossiped about them or those they love. And I know that I am not immune to being one who hurts either.

If we are to be a church that is to reach out in love to encourage others to faith, then what we say and how we say it are vital. Not just in church but in all our life. How we say things does matter. This does not mean that we must pretend everything is perfect when obviously it is not! Instead it means we need to be more thoughtful.

Before we complain, when was the last time you recognised the work and commitment that the person has shown before you complain about/to them?

Before we complain, do you know what it cost that person to get up today, do you know what pains and worries they carry, do you know what bravery it took to go out today, to face the world and try to do their best?

Before we complain, what way are we willing to compromise or work together for change? What ways are we to blame for our actions or inactions?

Before we complain, is the issue that you are not getting your own way rather than it is something that you would prefer was different?

Before we complain check, is this fair, is this just, is this honourable, is this gossip, will this build the body of Christ up?

Before we complain check, how does this help in showing our faith to the world? How does this encourage others to explore faith in our church?

“It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles”, says Jesus. Let us make a commitment together that from now on we shall avoid words that harm and words that defile, and instead use the words to build up, to encourage, to give life and to show love. That is how Jesus redeemed the mistake he made with the woman who persisted in asking for help for her daughter. And if it is good enough for Jesus, surely it is good enough for us.

**Prayers by Bridget Hugh Jones**

Loving heavenly Father, as you have given your people the gift of faith, make that faith powerful as a witness to your love….. let your church be constant in prayer, and a place of welcome and peace for everybody.

Lord in your mercy …**hear our prayer**

Forgive, O Lord, the sins that divide us. We pray that artificial barriers between people or nations may come down …..cleanse our thoughts of all that would demean others… We pray for all ethnic minority groups …for all who are judged because of their race ..creed …colour. We hold before you all refugees, all outcasts, all who feel rejected… God of compassion, your Son had his scope extended by the Canaanite woman’s persistence….challenge the boundaries that we set to our own charity and concern… open our hearts to embrace those easily excluded and despised.

Lord in your mercy …**hear our prayer**

Father, we pray today for the many places in the world where people are suffering from war…violence ..fear ..hatred .. and we hold before you particularly today the Lebanon, reeling from the violent explosion in Beirut and now staggering to restore some sort of normality. We pray for those bereaved ..wounded .. traumatised ..for the rescue services and the many people and agencies working to alleviate some of the desperate suffering. We pray too for those trying to form a government and for those in authority, that they may work to restore justice as well as peace.

Lord in your mercy …**hear our prayer**

Loving Father, we pray for our homes and families ..for all those we love and for all who love us, praying too for those whom we find difficult to love. As we continue to give thanks for the beauty of your creation, so we pray for all those who come on holiday here with us, that they may return to their homes refreshed and relaxed. As we struggle with the crowded roads and beaches, help us to be generous in sharing our corner of your world, and to be generous with our time.

Lord in your mercy …**hear our prayer**

God of compassion, we pray for the sick and suffering, and for all who care for them. We pray for those who are suffering because of the pandemic, for those who are sick, for those who care for them, for those working towards a cure, for those who have become anxious or depressed because of it. Give comfort to all who suffer with mental or emotional difficulties and give peace to all unquiet minds. In a moment of silence we pray for any known particularly to ourselves in need of your healing touch upon their lives.

Lord in your mercy …**hear our prayer**

We commend to your eternal care all who have died, for those who died in the night, for those who died alone, for those whose anniversary falls at this time. Grant us, with them, a share in your eternal kingdom.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**