

St Nicholas, 0800 Year B, 7th October, 2018

Malachi 2:1-9

Psalm 106:41-50

Mark 7:1-13

Malachi 2:2,8 (ESV) To the temple priests: “If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honour to my name...I will...I will curse your blessings....You have caused many to stumble by your instruction...says the LORD of hosts.”

Mark 7:6 (ESV) And (Jesus) said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;” (Isaiah 29:13)

1. Introduction

a) An eagle’s nest, high up on the sheer rocky mountain face - secure, impenetrable. The baby eaglet is warm and comfortable since birth, but the time has come for mother to do what she must do - the instinct has cut in - she pushes the eaglet towards the edge of the nest. “Mother what are you doing?” “What I must, my son.” Closer and closer towards the edge the eaglet is pushed, with many squawks, but - now - finally - out of the nest - in desperation flaps his wings and discovers a marvellous truth - he can fly, was born to fly! “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

It is never too late to learn to fly, to break out of that which has confined, limited us to our own expectations, to human traditions. Such may pass as right, godly, but **can** bind us, within stultifying conventions, practices, which turn into compulsive, even destructive, habits. Jude calls us from such idols, for “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, ... be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority...”

b) The Lord's purpose for all of us is to walk freely within the truth, εν Χριστω, to fulfill our destiny as His children, guided by the light of Christ in the presence, the power, of the Holy Spirit, that "by believing (we) have **life** in his name" - "for there is no other name...by which we must be saved." Jude's reminder is that it is the Lord, and only the Lord "who is able to keep us from stumbling". He does it, not us. We respond with either "yes" or "no"!

Jonah, the prophet, said "no" to the call to do a hair-raising, task - tell the blood-soaked Ninevites to repent - he shirked it - ran away - the whale story. But "When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord." Jonah got the message, went to Nineveh - "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" They, too, got the message repented, but you would not have given Jonah a medal because of his sulkiness - he stumbled, yes, but was compelled, in the end, to fly like an eagle.

Within the early church, John the Baptist came proclaiming "a baptism of repentance". Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God; repent...believe..." A dilemma emerged - resistance from the Pharisees. They didn't like what they heard, saw, "Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly". Such washings had nothing to do with personal hygiene, but were interpretations of the law, which became part of the tradition that the Pharisees placed, **as a burden**, on the people. "You have caused many to stumble by your instruction...says the LORD of hosts."

What they had missed, with the coming of Jesus, was that God's loving-kindness has no limit, that God "had broken out beyond the bounds of Jewish people", Jewish Law. They had tried to harness God, but who were they, who are we, to do that! That is not the way it works. Paul gets the right emphasis: "Through (Jesus) we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." God moves, God invites us "through Him, to "gain access", not to human rules, nor obligations, foibles even traditions, but to enter a new world, of freedom, of joy, with a flapping of wings, fulfilling His call of us, to His glory in praise and thanksgiving. It is the Lord who calls the shots, not us. Do we recognise this is **our** new world, given to us? "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." His will, not ours!

c) This discussion with the Pharisees reveals a rather static idea of God and what it means to serve him - obey the rules, be a good chappie, keep to the traditions, as we interpret them, and you are OK! All very formal - do it, or else cop it! The Pharisees are calling the shots, usurping the role of the Lord, and of scripture! Put it this way: did they, do we, “turn the divine initiative into a human enterprise”, turn our backs on God - do it our way, not His! A learned Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, known as the “gloomy” Dean, said, a 100 years ago, “Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next.” Worth considering!

This debate with Jesus is about “scripture” and “tradition”. Put simply - is our faith, what we believe, and how we practise it, based on the word of the Lord, or on customs, habits, set in concrete - traditions? Jesus is challenging the Pharisees, and us, with His Kingdom values, not human customs, the way we like it. Such purity, cleansing practices, became codified two centuries later, but Jesus is revealing the mind of the Lord **now**. Therefore, He says: you are hypocrites - play-acting - double-minded claiming to be teachers of God’s truth and law, but in fact teaching human traditions.

It only gets worse - “another tradition, or custom (Corban) was being used to enable people to get round their financial obligations to their parents...declaring their property to belong to God,.” so they could use it in their lifetime. Making such a declaration freed them from any “further obligation,” to the parents. But hold it, what has happened to that bit, that law to honour, and therefore love, your parents?

2 Prepared to Change?

a) No wonder Jesus, through quoting Isaiah, calls such a situation “hypocrisy” - “This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;”

“Hypocrisy”, a nasty word, but one which, if not actually tainting us, brushes each one of us. It is the Achilles’ heel of Christianity. Simply, “hypocrisy” is not practising what we preach, acting a part, pretense! It would be the strongest, most lethal charge, that the non-Christian world can, does, make against us. Sadly, it is true - historically we see it in the Crusades, Islam - and certainly today - child abuse is the tip of the iceberg.

“Hypocrisy” provides the perfect excuse not to have anything to do with Christ or the church, gives permission to denigrate us, to criticise, to stay away, to even want to get rid of us. This is our current situation and, therefore, **demand**s from every single

one of us a positive response, not band aids, certainly not compliance to the secular demands to silence us, to water down the faith, as they seek to quash us! The authorities of St Paul's Cathedral London recently called the police to take away a man who was reading the Bible on the steps outside. Oh dear! Is more to this story than we know?

When Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," He meant it, and the implications are there. Recall one of the most poignant prayers of Jesus, on the eve of the crucifixion: "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? (answer - "no") But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." There it is - the Father's will - always - His sacrifice for our salvation! Our sacrifice for the sake of Gospel, for our world!

Are we people of **that** truth? Is it we who determine what a Christian looks like, or does the Holy Spirit, shape us, mould us, teach us to fly? Do we just go along with the practices, the traditions, of which there are plenty, get angry when they are changed, or do we have a deep grasp of where we are heading ἐν Χριστῷ, seeking with all our heart a change of heart?

To be a Christian is not just a question of the head, of what we know. It is of the heart. It is often right here that we stumble, content to be what we always have been, complying with how we were brought up, but not growing in Christ. **Is that too rough?** It shouldn't be, if we want to be true to Christ. So we pray, "Help me, help us, Lord to deal with our hypocrisy, to be people of the truth, pulsating with your life, as beacons for others - you can do it Lord, grow us more into your likeness!"

To pray such a prayer indicates that we are prepared to re-examine ourselves, to check where we really stand, what is our "world-view", how we understand things.. Do we see our world through the eyes of Christ, as compared with secularist, atheistical, views which seek to rubbish Jesus, and which, in the end, will destroy not only us but themselves as well? Why ask such a question? Because whatever answer you might give, **that** answer is built upon faith. Christians have faith to believe in God - we cannot prove it. Atheists also have faith - they cannot prove that God does not exist! QED.

b) Would it be too crass to think that many people do not think like this - all too hard! Rather leave it - find a diversion - don't have to think about it. Escapism - there are plenty of boltholes, such as sport! Remember Jonah? Like him we run away from what we are called to deal with, follow through. If we are not facing such issues now, we will have to in the future, as the secularists seek to undermine, even control. get rid of Christianity, despite the fact that our society is built upon Christian foundations. All that is at stake.

c) Our Western world, inheritance, with its Christian foundation is disintegrating, with pressure from three directions:

- the secular atheistical world who reckon humans can solve all problems.
- secondly, the majority, who are either agnostic (do not know - afraid to commit) or indifferent to the Kingdom of God, couldn't care less!
- the third thrust comes from the militant, especially Islam with its desire to impose sharia law.

Jonah's story can act as a mirror. He struggled, got there in the end - he repented - the Ninevites repented, changed direction, hearts were renewed, God relented. It is an extraordinary story of a call, not just for Jonah but for all of us as God opens the door of the kingdom of God inviting us to an adventure with Him whose purpose is nothing less than the redemption of all creation. Do we want to participate in the unfolding action and grace of God's initiative? Do we want to be a people of hope, soar like an eagle on the breath of the Holy Spirit?

3 Revival

a) How do we respond as church, as individuals?

- deal, expunge, through prayer and repentance, any hypocrisy, pretense, playing games, that is amongst us - be genuine.
- Pray with all our might for revival, which can be described as: "a supernatural event affecting both church and society - a work of the Holy Spirit which brings: an overpowering sense of God's presence, leading to inspired worship; a hungry desire for holiness through a deep conviction of sin, even amongst those outside

the church; a supernatural drawing of people together in unity with an outpouring of love for one another, and many coming to faith - transformation!"

There are many such moments in history **so why not now:**

- Wesleyan Revival - John Wesley died in 1791 but 50,000 to 80,000 people had come to faith.
- 1859 Ulster Revival over a 100,000 converts, spread to UK, USA and other countries.
- 1904 Welsh Revival 100,000 people came to faith.
- 1949-52 Hebrides Revival with hundreds coming to faith.

Father God wants we Christians to eagerly desire such a movement of His Spirit, the spirit of Jesus, through persistent prayer and repentance. The disciples didn't wait for Pentecost, they prayed. Are we, are you, prepared to do that - to pray for revival. a fresh Pentecost to change us, to change our society?

Change my heart oh God
Make it ever true
Change my heart oh God
May I be like You (Repeat)

You are the potter
I am the clay
Mould me and make me
This is what I pray

Repeat the verse.