

Worcester Cathedral – 2 June 2024,

Trinity 1 – Eucharist 10.30 pm

Readings: Deut. 5, 12-15; Ps 81; 2 Cor. 4. 5-12: Mark 2. 23 – 3.6

- Why are you here, what do you hope for each week?
- Good music, remembering Christ's death, stimulating sermon (oh dear!), meeting friends, getting a deeper awareness of God, increasing hope in a desperate world.
- Is it something you feel you ought to do to obey the commandment or something you cannot do without.
- How does the reality of our faith show itself?
- Is one aspect keeping the Sabbath/Sunday worship rules?
- The commandment argues no work on the Sabbath, focus on God who delivered you out of Egypt.
- Does that translate into same rule for Sunday because Jesus died and rose again out of love for us?
- Is a good person is someone who follows the rules thou shalt, thou shalt not.
- Many religions are like this.
- Judaism in Jesus time certainly seems to have been like this, if the attitudes of the so-called leaders are to be recognised.
- Every minute infringement was noted.
- Jesus seems to go out of his way to provoke conflict, or was it that being a Person in close relationship with God was incompatible with legalistic rule keeping in loving living?
- In Mark 2 - 3.6 five controversies are described that pitted Jesus' life and ministry against the legalism of contemporary religious rules.
- There was the healing of paralytic man whose friends let him down through a roof so that they could get him to Jesus.
- As Jesus healed the man he said that his sins were forgiven. This resulted in horrified accusations of blasphemy by the scribes, how can this man say this, only God can forgive sins. Jesus' ironic reply, "Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven or to tell a paralysed man to get up and walk!" You can imagine that went down well with his accusers!
- Then he was accused of associating and eating with tax collectors and sinners, surely not the behaviour of a holy man.
- Then he was accused of not encouraging his disciples to fast when it was customary to fast.
- Then we have the two stories of apparent breaking of Sabbath rules.

- Where were these Pharisees? Were they hiding low down in the cornfield and popped up to catch the disciples as they picked the ears of grain? Sneaky, they were really out to catch them!
- Jesus asks them how this trivial action compares with the actions of the revered King David and his companions eating the sacred temple bread when they were hungry. In essence, go get a life!! The sabbath is made for man's flourishing not to provide yet another rule to follow.
- Then we have the horrifying story of the religious leaders watching out to see if Jesus would heal the man with the withered arm so they could accuse him of commandment breaking.
- Jesus was angry at the hardness of their rule keeping obsession that would have the man left in his suffering rather than to share the love of God with him on this holy day.
- As we know when Jesus was asked what was the most important commandment, he explained that the Ten Commandments were meant to provide a structure to help folks love God and one another.
- Sadly, the religious leaders had divorced the rules from love, and decided they had to be policed in minute detail which gave the leadership power over religious life.
- No wonder Jesus was angry - they had no care for the man or God, only their power and position. So they go out and plot how to get rid of Jesus. Isn't that the way of the world? Get and hold on to power, benefit from it and make sure by all means possible that you hold on to it.
- It is interesting how whenever any part of human life becomes institutionalised, leaders emerge, and rules are set as to how people have to do things correctly or acceptably to be part of the group. Those who offend are frequently ostracised and persecuted.
- It happens in social and hobby groups; political parties and it is especially true in religious groups.
- Jesus highlighted in his behaviour how the law was best lived in love for God and other human beings:
- Loving healing on the Sabbath and loving understanding for the adulterous woman who had been trapped by the Pharisees.
- Jesus mixed and shared meals with the despised tax collectors and so-called sinners. Jesus chatted to the alien Samaritan woman at the well. He allowed himself to be anointed by a woman of suspect morals!
- Jesus' approach to rules was clearly determined by love, the sabbath was made to enable humans to flourish in their love and joy for God, creation and one another. Jesus loved all whatever their lifestyle, ethnic or religious background or moral reputation.
- Yes, all this put him on a collision course with the religious authorities and he was seen as a threat to the established order and the power of the leaders.
- What is really distressing is that as Christian communities became institutionalised this has happened down the ages within and amongst so-called Christian churches.

If you didn't live the right sort of life or didn't believe the right doctrine or dogma, you could be ostracised or even put to death.

- Some of us have been reading a book about how Christians have advocated or fiercely opposed the use of Silence in private and corporate worship from the early Church until now. The language became quite vigorous, and some on each side have been thrown out of the fellowship of different communities.
- You must do things our way or get on your bike! Not too much of Jesus in that approach.
- Another aspect of the abandonment of Godly love in religious thinking on Church and societal life is demonstrated by the way in which Christianity through much of its history embraced beliefs and behaviours apparently derived from scripture that encouraged antisemitism, homophobia, misogyny, slavery, exploitation of the planet.
- How is it that these beliefs and attitudes, and the resulting practice have been so perniciously widespread in so-called Christian communities?
- Antisemitism grew partly from the fact that the Jewish leaders were blamed for the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Misogyny was inherited from the patriarchy evident in the Old Testament world, and partly reinforced due to Paul's apparent strictures about women keeping quiet in Church.
- Homophobia again from the Old Testament and Paul's letter to the Romans.
- Slavery was justified because it seems to be assumed in the commandment we read this morning, and right through the OT, and Paul also seems to assume its rightness in his letter to Philemon.
- Exploitation of the planet was justified because of the interpretation of the command in Genesis to rule over and subdue creation.
- Somehow the implications that follow from all human beings being made in the image of a loving God were lost as scripture was enlisted to support these behaviours and they are all clearly contrary to Jesus' commandment of love for God and all our neighbours.
- However, although today some parts of the Church, though not all, have seen how contrary to Jesus way of love these behaviours are, many of the problems in seeing the love that Jesus advocated in current Church life are concerned with the human rules and power dynamics that have been erected around communal Worship.
- This is ironic that Jesus never told us to worship him, just follow him.
- Take ministry/leadership, the Christian church is divided over who can and who cannot lead, some believe in an ordained priesthood, others in the priesthood of all believers.
- Some until recently believed that women and gays could not be leaders or priests, some still do. There somehow seems to be an underlying supposition that the leaders/clergy (particularly if they are male) are closer to being in the image of God than the laity, but maybe it is still to do with power?

- Holy communion when we remember the love of God for us, shown in Christ's identification in the human suffering brought on by sin, has been set around by rules as to how it is carried through, who can receive it and when.
- Church communities get severe attacks of the oughteries around holy communion.
- Some say as the most important service of Christian worship it ought to be every week, even every day. Others say that makes it too routine and its solemnity is lost, better every month or even every 3 months with extended preparation.
- Some say only the certified Christians should partake, others that only those who believe in the Trinity, only those who have been baptised as adults, only those who have been confirmed, others that all are welcome.
- Some of these can be seen as preferences and we are all different, but Christians have argued fiercely and even killed each other over it. How can those who identify as Jesus' disciples behave in such a way over what is a love feast when we rejoice and are thankful for God's love so undeserved.
- We don't do too well do we?
- A quotation from Richard Rohr's Meditation I received on Tuesday:
- What would it mean to build a society in which every person is treated as an image of the Divine? How would this affect our relationships with our neighbours, our coworkers, the stranger lying beneath the stained blankets and trash outside Starbucks? Wouldn't it compel us to recast the cultures of our schools, organizations, and especially our faith communities? How would it impact health care, education, public policy?... How would it transform law enforcement and criminal justice systems?
- Rather relevant to our nation at election time, but also very relevant to us here as followers of Jesus, do we love the Divine in each other.
- We are all created in God's image and by the Holy Spirit God dwells in each one of us. It is not that we love each other because we are Divine in our behaviour, but because God lives in us. *It is the only solution.*
- Can you love me because God lives in me, can I love you, because God lives in you? (*pause*)
- We will soon come to Communion,
- When we come to Communion and take the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ, as the old communion words said – *be thankful.*
- It is sad we have lost those words, for in a very real sense in all of our difference as we eat and drink, we are assured that Christ by his Spirit is with us and amongst us and will never leave us until the end of time. Let us rejoice and be thankful.
- Amen