

Fourth Sunday after Trinity

SEEING THE TRUTH

Continuing the theme of discipleship, this week we reflect on Jesus' words to those who saw what he did, and heard what he said, but were blind to where his deeds pointed, and deaf to the truth which his words expressed.

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

We lift up our hearts in thanks and praise:

Glory to you, O God!

PRAISE

I danced in the morning
When the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon
And the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven
And I danced on the earth,
At Bethlehem
I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe
And the pharisee,
But they would not dance
And they wouldn't follow me.

I danced for the fishermen,
For James and John –
They came with me
And the Dance went on.

Dance then ...

I danced on the Sabbath
And I cured the lame;
The holy people
Said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
And they hung me on high,
And they left me there
On a Cross to die.

Dance then ...

I danced on a Friday
When the sky turned black –
It's hard to dance
With the devil on your back.
They buried my body
And they thought I'd gone,
But I am the Dance,
And I still go on.

Dance then ...

They cut me down
And I leapt up high;
I am the life
That'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
If you'll live in me –
I am the Lord
Of the Dance, said he.

Dance then ...

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we come before God asking him to cleanse our hearts that we may worship and follow him in Spirit and in truth. In a time of silence reflect on your life in the last week, asking God to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

You were sent to heal the contrite:
Father, have mercy.

You came to call sinners:
Christ, have mercy.

You plead for us at the right hand of the Father:
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy upon me, forgive me my sins,
and keep me in eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Gracious Father, by the obedience of Jesus
you brought obedience to our wayward world:
draw us into harmony with your will,
that we may find all things restored in him,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

READINGS

Read: Zechariah 9.9-12

Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The symbolism is important: when a king came in peace he rode on a donkey; when he came for war he rode on a horse. The message of peace is made clear by the prophet: 'he shall command peace to the nations.' And for the ordinary people there is good news: prisoners will be set free from the waterless pit. 'Prisoners' in this context generally means those imprisoned for debt, and Isaiah extends this promise to the poor generally, to the blind and to all 'broken victims' (Isaiah 61.1-2). Jesus took Isaiah's words on to his own lips at the synagogue in Capernaum at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4.14-20). His actions in freeing those who were bound pointed to the truth of who he was – for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear.

Verses from Psalm 145

I will extol you, my God and king,
and bless your name forever and ever.

I will bless you day after day,
and praise your name forever and ever.

Age to age shall proclaim your works,
shall declare your mighty deeds.
They will recall your abundant goodness,
and sing of your just deeds with joy.

For you are kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
You are loving to everyone
and your compassion is over all your works.

All your works shall thank you, O LORD,
and all your faithful ones bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your reign,
and declare your mighty deeds,

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;
your rule endures for all generations.

The LORD is faithful in all his words,
and holy in all his deeds.

The LORD supports all who fall,
and raises up all who are bowed down.

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.

Alleluia!

Read: MATTHEW 11.16 – 30

REFLECTION – *Made in Heaven?*

Jesus did not come with a label 'Made in Heaven'. Those who met him had to work out for themselves who he was, as indeed we have to do today. And it is clear that not everyone got the answer right – actually most people got it wrong. Jesus compares them to children who stubbornly refuse to join in the game. Everything has been done for them, the piper is playing the right tune, but they refuse to join in. We have all seen children like that – it was probably true of us all at some time – and it's an attitude that can persist into adulthood. Jesus is travelling around Galilee where he has performed some remarkable signs, where people have marvelled at the authority with which he speaks, but the people refuse, like bad-tempered children to follow in their hearts where the signs point. Nothing satisfies them.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called for repentance, but the people have not heeded their words. They avoid the issue by pointing to the differences between Jesus and John – in much the same way that politicians avoid criticism of their own shortcomings

by pointing the finger at someone else. ‘Who can you believe these days?’ the people protest. John lived an austere life, neither eating nor drinking, so they say he must have been mad; Jesus enjoyed his food and drink, so they describe him as a glutton and a drunkard – and, for good measure, they criticise the company he keeps: his friendship with tax collectors and sinners puts him beyond the pale: ‘Oh, my God! How can we believe people like that?’

Jesus’ response is that the deeds speak for themselves, and those who do not repent will pay the price. Their fate will be worse than that of Sodom, the biblical epitome of wickedness!

Reading the signs and following where they lead is the challenge of faith in any age, and as Jesus comments in the next part of the reading, adulthood brings a sophistication in which we pride ourselves on our wisdom and learning which is the enemy of faith. Children may be difficult at times and refuse to join the game, but these times are limited; childhood is more generally characterised by a trusting nature, and a willingness to follow where others lead. But as we grow older attitudes harden, and our pride obstructs our spiritual growth. We may hear the words, and see the deeds, but we’d have to surrender too much to follow where they lead. As we grow, what we need to hang on to is not a stubborn pride in our own rightness, but the trustfulness that we had as children. Following him trustfully, we shall find in Jesus rest for our souls.

Commenting on this passage, John Fenton says that it presents us with the alternative: faith or unbelief. This is the choice that faces everyone, but according to the biblical authors this choice is not entirely in one’s own hands. Faith is a blessing from God, and refusal to believe is also ascribed to the action of God. St Paul says that God ‘shows mercy as he chooses, but also makes stubborn as he chooses.’ (*Romans 9.18*). And Jesus says that it is *God* who has hidden the truth from the learned and wise and revealed it to the simple. At the same time, if God is a loving Father, as Jesus taught, we cannot believe that his actions are capricious or arbitrary; rather we must see them as related to the lives of men and women. It’s not so much God who

hides the truth from the learned and wise, it is their arrogance and pride that closes their eyes and ears and they refuse to repent; it is the humble and lowly whose eyes and ears are open, whose lack of pride does not blind them to the truth of God.

I think a large part of the problem is that we can only 'see' what we can recognise. Truth for the learned and the wise is often something cut-and-dried, something that has a propositional quality that can be pinned down and analysed, and appropriated intellectually. The truth that God reveals in Jesus has an open texture; it is far from being cut-and-dried; it is personal rather than propositional, like a person it defies analysis, and is appropriated intuitively and through the feelings. Our intellect will only take us so far in the journey of faith; what Jesus offered the people of Galilee, and what he offers to us, is a path that has been described as a way of unknowing, where trust replaces certainty, and faith replaces knowledge. Blessed are those who walk that path.

Pause and reflect.

RESPONSE

Be still and know that I am God. (x3)

I am the Lord that healeth thee. (x3)

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust. (x3)

PRAYERS

A time of free prayer and intercession. You might like to use this five-fold pattern:

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far
For those who have died

At the end:

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

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and for ever. Amen.