

24 Wellwright Road  
Fairwater  
Cardiff  
CF5 3ED  
[bjhuxy@gmail.com](mailto:bjhuxy@gmail.com)  
07734248869

Dear Friends

*Matthew 15 v 10-20, 21-28 Romans 11 1-2a, 29-32*

***“It’s all in the attention to detail”***



What a joy it was to welcome visiting clerics to our parish this week, both of whom I have had the pleasure of worshipping with when I was an ordinand ministering in the East Vale – Rev'd Sue, with her gentle and calming preaching on Prayer, and Bishop Richard with his passionate storm of a sermon on the Gospel. Both strong characters with very different approaches, and I am reminded that in our differences



there is a richness and a depth for which I am truly thankful. I am also thankful, as I am sure you are, for their service in these very tricky times. I can't help but think how strange and disorientating it must be for them presiding with all the new measures in place. Attention to detail really has taken on a whole new meaning!

I know after speaking with some of you following the services on Sunday that you enjoy listening to different people preaching. I find it encouraging and inspiring, particularly as one who is learning the craft. I believe we learn so much from each other in our sharing, our understanding of scripture, and how it bears fruit in our lives, so I am also thankful to our gospel chat zoom group who meet every Tuesday. I am very aware that for some of us we are still unable to engage fully in church or online so, this week, I bring something from last week's preaching; a nugget of wisdom as we reflect on this week's readings. Rev'd Sue began her sermon speaking about how the smallest detail can affect our lives. Attention to detail is at times essential but there are times when it can lead us to miss the point altogether.

In the first part of our gospel we see a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the interpretation of the law. We do well to remember that the law was just as important to Jesus (being Jewish) as it was to the pharisees. These disagreements are nothing new; in fact we see this so often it's easy to just accept this as the norm and overlook what's happening.

Now the Pharisees were totally passionate about the law. After all, their whole lives had been devoted to it, praying, studying and mediating on the Torah in order to interpret and understand it. Some may think this borders on obsession, but do we not also feel that same passion for those things we are devoted to in our own lives? And how often does our passion get mistaken for obsession? When pharisaic laws were created, they were driven by this passion and love of God and the intention was to do good and to protect the law of Moses. This is played out in the hand washing debate – ironic really as we find ourselves constantly gelling our hands!

The Torah contained detailed information, but even with all that detail it could not be applied in every situation, and that is the crux of the matter. The love of God and His laws, and the desire to be faithful, meant that the Mishnah (from 200BC to 135AD) and the Talmud (around 200AD) were developed to help interpret the law and provide guidance for living. It may be useful to think of these in term of policies, protocols and guidelines – you will know there is a difference between them – and it is this difference that Jesus is pointing out. Jesus shows that, by getting hung up on the detail, they can no longer see the wood for the trees. Attention to detail has its place but, in this

instance, they have backed themselves into a corner. This attention to detail has made the law more and more complicated, binding and constrictive.

Jesus responds by challenging the Pharisees. He reminds them that they fail to keep God's law to honour father and mother, one of the commandments, an exception is permitted by Pharisaic Law. The discussion then goes on to debate what does and does not defile.

This discourse is basically about words and actions. They say 'actions speak louder than words' which may be true but, in my experience, say one word out of place and people remember it every time they see you. Jesus is now speaking with his disciples and clarifying the matter by using comparisons between good and evil. He uses the example of the gut, which can be emptied easily, but emptying the heart is difficult (remember the parable of the weeds). What is in our heart can be expressed in our words and our actions.

Hateful words damage everyone – the one who speaks them, the one who receives them, and the one who overhears. Words do hurt as much as sticks and stones and it can take longer to heal and sometimes people never heal. Jesus speaks of evil thoughts, words and actions that have a damaging effect on relationships. We know, do we not, that only forgiveness can redeem us?

If we don't get distracted by the detail of food and hygiene issues, we can see that this is all about obedience to God. Jesus steers the conversation away from the detail to try and get people to see the bigger picture. Jesus says what is important to God is what is happening in our heart, our feelings, our thoughts and our motives. These are all reflected in our words and, in turn, our actions.

The religious leaders may have viewed Jesus as being disobedient to the law; this is the theme Paul picks up in his letter to the Romans. Paul speaks of disobedience. What he is alluding to is that disobedience exists. It is not good, but it can bring about good by God's grace and love. Disobedience can be redeemed. We must suffer the consequences of our actions and our words so that, in Paul's words, "they may turn to Christ and be justified freely by his grace through redemption in Christ". Mercy, forgiveness, redemption and healing all are offered to us because of God's infinite love for us and, as St Paul reminds us, this is a love from which nothing will separate us.

Focusing on the heart isn't as easy as it sounds for it involves us having to look deep within ourselves with an honesty that will challenge our thoughts, feelings, words and actions. How many times do we focus on the finite details to win an argument? Would it not be easier to follow a set of prescribed rules set by others? It is human nature to favour the easier option.

These readings reflect the transitional state of the church at this time, but they are also relevant to us today as we, too, have faced and continue to face a huge transition. In fact, the church that embraces the challenges of transition is not only healthy but fully alive. Attention to detail is important. Of course, it has its place when we consider prevention of COVID-19, but let us not let it distract us from rethinking the Mission and ministry to which we are all called.

## **Love in Christ**

### **Belinda**

