

Questions for our Times

READINGS: Philippians: 2 1-13 and Matthew 21: 23-32

We are now living in challenging and dangerous times and so we have many questions on our minds to help us get through them.

But every generation has its own questions to ask.

In Jesus' times, many were asking him this question: 'How can I be part of the Kingdom you preach and teach about?'

And the religious leaders of the day were asking Jesus: 'By what authority do you say and do the things you do?'

We see something of this going on in the Gospel Reading.

When I think of Jesus confronting the religious authorities of the day, I think that these words from the hymn "There's a wideness in God's mercy" apply to them.

'But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own, and we magnify his strictness by a zeal he will not own.'

Perhaps those words explain why Jesus in the reading refuses to answer any of the questions from the religious of the day. He knows as regards who he really was, they just don't get it.

But he does have an answer for them in the Parable of the Two Sons and their Father which we also find in the Gospel Reading.

His answer for them (and now us) is "Which of the sons did the will of his Father ?" And his enemies have to admit it was the younger son who changed his mind and simply said "Yes" to his Father.

Jesus reply also makes me reflect on these words also from the hymn 'There's a wideness in God's Mercy'.

'If our love were more but simple, we should take him at his word.

And our hearts would find assurance in the promise of the Lord.'

As far as I can see, those words are the foundation of our faith journey. It is as simple as that.

But saying "Yes" to that statement does put a huge burden on us. This is because people will often judge the success or failure of the Christian faith journey by what we say or do. This is because we are its boots on the ground. They will all too quickly say- 'You are not worthy of your callings' if they see chinks or gaps in our armour. So we need to pray to be found worthy of our callings and to be obedient to them.

And we find the word "obedience" in the epistle where Paul tells the Philippians (and so now us) that followers of Christ must remain obedient as to what they (and so now us) are being asked to do for Christ.

So how can we remain obedient to Christ?

Perhaps there is much truth in these words of John Wesley:

Do all the good you can

By all the means you can.

In all the ways you can.

In all the places you can.

At all times you can.

To all peoples you can.

As long as you ever can.

Perhaps too this story can help us to continue to say 'Yes' to Christ.

During the Cold War, a man approached a border post and was asked the following questions:

'Who are you ? What do you do? Where have you come from?

Where are you going to?'

I suppose they are standard border guard questions.

Perhaps in our challenging times we can adapt them to ask ourselves and as a Christian Faith Community the following questions:

'As followers of Christ and as a Christian Faith Community what do we do to live out our callings?

Why do we gather on Sundays?

What signs of new life and new hope can we give in times of a pandemic?'

We need to think about these questions to show that our faith journey is still relevant and that it really does still work. It can then be passed onto those who are to come into it after us.

I will end with a hopeful Prayer/Meditation for ourselves in these traumatic times by Rendell Harris:

'Give us this day our daily discovery.'

Jonathan Slater

Licensed Lay Minister/ Reader

St Giles Church Bramhope