

HOMILY: Sunday 5th November 2017

Readings: Matthew 23:1–12 (NRSV); 1 Thessalonians 2:9–13 (NRSV)

Supporting stories:

Jesus Turns Things Upside Down (Lectionary Story Bible Year A p.231)

Is this who I am? (a Retelling of a traditional Lakota story – p.42-43 More Wisdom Stories, Margaret Silf)

Address

At the moment our newspapers are full of reports of abuses of power. Not so long ago the focus was on financial impropriety by our MPs, varying from padding expenses to outright fraud. Now attention has turned to sexual impropriety, varying from clumsy advances to assault.

Power is an intoxicating thing. It can fool us into thinking that we can do no wrong, that consequences won't apply to us, and we can forget that mutual respect is the right of everyone – not just those we choose to give it to.

To counter this, we have Jesus' vision and example of humble leadership. Leadership that places others first, that is embarrassed by fuss and flattery, and that opens up a conversation to discern the better path. Jesus denounces the Pharisees for being hypocrites and for making the way of God nigh on impossible to follow. He encourages the crowd to listen to their teaching, and then apply it for themselves. In our reading from Thessalonians we are encouraged to respect and support those in leadership, and leaders are called to behave as loving parents, urging, encouraging, and pleading with those who follow to lead lives worthy of God.

Up until yesterday my plan was just to share two stories for you to reflect upon. I felt that trying to preach on these passages just left me wide open to being a hypocrite. None of us are perfect. None of us are ideal disciples of Christ, whether we be ministers, elders, members, part of the wider church family – or joining us here for the first time.

Perfection is what the Pharisees demanded from others, and excused in themselves. Perfection is within the heart of God, and we can but glimpse it on this side of eternity.

We are all called to listen to the words of Jesus, the stories about how he lived, taught and behaved, and explore the insights from the wealth of Christian history and thought, the knowledge that science opens up to us about life and the universe, and through reflecting on all of that try to discern the way of God within it all.

We may take wrong turns, stumble or at times lose our patience, but God is with us. Christ accompanies us through our brothers and sisters who surround us here, and the people we meet in our daily lives.

The Spirit inspires us as we discern the path ahead, and connects us to each other and with the heart of God.

We are here to support, encourage and challenge each other on the journey of faith.

We are all called to offer humble leadership to each other. To behave as loving parents, urging, encouraging, and pleading with each other to lead lives worthy of God.

We are called to be Church, to be followers of the Way of Christ.