

Sunday 29th September 2024

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity (Creationtide)

Gospel Reading

Mark 9.38-50

Another Exorcist

³⁸ John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ ³⁹ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

Temptations to Sin

⁴² ‘If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ ‘For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’

Other Readings: Esther 7.1-6,9,10; 9.20-22 Psalm 124 James 5.13-20

Homily

It is really interesting to explore this passage through the lens of ‘Creationtide’. During this season we are encouraged to think about our stewardship of the world’s resources, our place in God’s creation and to think of the impact our actions have on others and the environment. As well as taking time to be in awe of the wonder and extravagance of a God who would set in motion a universe as vast and dazzling as this one.

How might we consider ‘stumbling blocks’ in the context of the climate crisis and our place in God’s creation?

In the global north, we love to consume – plastics, fossil fuels, food, water, fast fashion - and these resources seem to be in plentiful supply. How often do we think about how our consumption might impact other parts of the world? We might notice plastic washing up on our beaches but we don’t have a plastic island (that according to some estimates might be three times the size of France) lurking off our coast. For that, we need to travel to the Pacific

Ocean. We might think of our relative material wealth as being like the body with all its limbs and organs – eyes, hands and feet. But our capacity to consume stuff becomes a stumbling block. We can buy fruit and vegetables all year round (except Brussels sprouts!) but that comes at a cost to the environment and the countries where they are grown. Export crops are grown rather than food crops for the domestic market which puts up prices of food; fossil fuels are required to refrigerate and transport delicate fruit to its final destination. Think of the effort involved in producing strawberries in January.

These are the things that cause us to stumble. It is hard to live in a way that is gentler to the environment. We have become very comfortable with the things we can consume. But our over consumption of creature comforts is causing us to deforest, exploit and heat up our planet. We might not be taking an axe to the rainforest ourselves but our demands are encouraging others to do it to meet our needs. We might not be feeling it, but the people of the global south are bearing the brunt.

How do we need to adjust our lifestyles in order to leave a smaller carbon footprint on the earth? What choices do we need to make to enable others to make good choices too?

The collect for this Sunday asks God to, ‘...increase in us your gift of faith that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before, we may run the way of your commandments.’ The environmental crisis can sometimes feel overwhelming – any personal change in habits is inadequate in the face of the catastrophe that scientists warn us about in the future. But our faith in what lies before (in front) of us is a gift from God. The possibility of a world where we can live more equitably and sustainably is a matter of faith, and faith comes from God. Jesus commands us in this gospel passage, to do nothing that will cause another person, or ourselves to stumble. This is a moment to think about how our consumption causes us to stumble but also harms others and to think about taking steps to change.

Conversation Questions

1. *What might you do differently now as a result of this reflection?*
2. The passage concludes with, ‘and be at peace with one another.’ What does this look like in your church/town/country/planet?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;*

*through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*God, our judge and saviour,
teach us to be open to your truth
and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day
with confidence in the salvation which is given
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.