

Sermon for 13.2.22 The Third Sunday before Lent (Psalm 1, Luke 6:17-26)

Lord Jesus Christ, open our ears, our minds and our hearts to receive your word.

The sun from the hot courtyard filters through the small square window of a tiny study room, lighting up the dust motes dancing in the air. It casts its golden glow onto the rough-hewn bench where a psalmist sits prayerfully, his head bowed over his clasped hands.

“O Lord, our people are forsaking your truths again,” he prays. “They’re being seduced by the advice of those advocating ungodly pleasures. People are turning away from God to substitute idols. Your truths are being discarded as outdated and worthless.”

He sighs deeply.

“How Lord to remind people of the consequences of their lifestyle choices? I need some words from you to sing out in our worship. We have to rekindle faith in God in these changing times.”

He pauses; then slowly lifts his head as inspiration begins to take shape. He’s remembering passing a field of crops as the wind rattled the dried out seed heads, and then how the path took him to a stream bordered by a strip of verdant green where a fruitful tree grew; its roots reaching into the water.

“That tree is what rooting our lives in God is like, and the dried out crops like putting our trust in things that have no substance.”

He’ll sing about the two choices we have in life using those dried out crops and the fruitful tree as his metaphor. He’ll sing how one choice, the path of sin, offers just an empty life that promises nothing lasting, and he’ll sing that the other, the tree rooted in the law of the Lord, promises a life in which we’ll flourish.

And now, we too sit here perhaps reflecting on our readings this morning, wondering what they might have to say to us, waiting to be inspired.

Is our world any different? How are we doing with **our** choices, both individually and as a church? Are **we** living fruitfully like that tree described by the psalmist, with our feet rooted in God’s truths? Do we have a sense of inner peace that comes from being rooted in our faith? How are we managing living it out, while the world and its messages continually urge us to adopt other ways? Are my choices ethical choices, Godly choices? The world persistently informs us that telling the truth is optional and that not owning up to wrong doing is acceptable if you can get away with it. I’m urged to fine tune my beliefs to fit with society’s norms otherwise I’m regarded as an unacceptable person.

And how are we doing as a church? I don’t mean as **this** church in particular, but as **the** church. For example, where is our robust challenge to some of the alternative religions of the day like the sanctification of science? Where is the church talking about the making permanent of the policy of women receiving abortion pills at home without any checks? Where is the church talking about the bill currently going through parliament on assisted

dying? Are not all these questions worthy of discussion in the light of our faith? Is ignoring them making us any more fruitful?

The Rev. Dr. David Goodhew recently made a detailed study of church attendance and far from churches being fruitful trees, it would seem that our leaves are withering away quite dramatically. He concluded his report with these words "The primary common denominator in the decline is theology. Those churches trimming faith to fit in with culture, have tended to shrink, and those offering a "full-fat" faith, vividly supernatural, have tended to grow."

This morning we've heard the psalmist's words. Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord.

And of course, we know the law of the Lord isn't always easy to discern, nor on the surface does it sound quite as attractive and advantageous a path to explore as some of the alternatives. Indeed, to be honest it sounds an awful lot like rules and regulations and suitable marks out of 10, and, well, we all know how we deal with a lengthy list of terms and conditions - a casual tick in the box without even a glance at what is laid down.

In our gospel reading today Jesus also talks about what will eventually happen for different kinds of people who find themselves following certain paths in life. He tells us that whatever situation we find ourselves in, that will not be as it always is. Those who are struggling now through no fault of their own, those who centre their lives on God and find themselves criticised or ridiculed or blamed for making the wrong choices, all will, in time, be truly blessed, for God is present with us even when the world has abandoned us or we feel it hates us. Those who enjoy much bounty now by choosing to focus their lives on themselves rather than trusting God and living out his truths, they will find such bounty fleeting.

And what do those words mean for us as the church? I think Jesus is saying that if we focus on loving the people God loves, on speaking out and challenging those decisions from authorities and others that undermine or contradict our faith, then we as the church will be blessed.

Because we have his ultimate promise. The psalmist tells us, the Lord watches over us. That's a pretty affirming sort of promise. And yes, we'll go home today and in many respects the world will still be just as it is; and we'll still find ourselves struggling with our choices. But today we've been reminded that the more we root ourselves in streams of living water, in God himself, the less we'll be shaken when stormy winds blow. The Lord watches over his people. We shall be blessed. Amen.

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