

Reflection – 16th Sunday after Trinity – 27th September 2020

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer should be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.

Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountain
from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness
in our wanderings be our guide
through endeavour, failure, danger
Father, be thou at our side.

Collect

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you and grant that they both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

A reading from Exodus chapter 17 verses 1-7

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew Chapter 21 verses 23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'"

So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

This is the Gospel of The Lord: Praise to you O Christ

Reflection

Through his ministry, Jesus often met with opposition. In this gospel reading, Jesus is in Jerusalem, the centre of the faith. The chapter began with his triumphal entry (vv. 1-11) and his clearing the temple area (v 12-13) of money lenders.

Understandably, the faith authorities of the times challenged Him. What's this Galilean up to causing such disruption? Being responsible for the religious life of Israel and the operation of the temple, they wanted to know his credentials. Who gave Jesus this authority? Also, John Baptist had been accepted by people as a new prophet, teaching repentance and change, and he had been leading them to Jesus, forgiveness, and 'new life'.

Recall Jesus' ministry, his interactions and relationship with his disciples and others along the way. Crowds flocked to hear his compassionate teaching (e.g. Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5), feeding of thousands (Matt 14: 13-21) or individuals sought him out. I think, it seems the ordinary people accepted Jesus' authority. He made things better, made things 'new' (e.g. wedding at Canaan – ordinary water became wine (John 2: 1-11). Jesus brought something 'new'; the possibility of 'abundant life'.

People responded to Jesus. He accepts us as we are. Mary Magdalene recognised Jesus voice, taking him to be the gardener. In daily life, circumstances so ordinary, we don't always realize in whose company we are/ have been/ what's going on. Jesus shows us God *is* in the world, in the ordinary muddle, the ups and downs of life, in which we play our part helping each other along the way. Jesus calls us and commands us to 'love each other' (John15: 17).

From the Old Testament reading, we learn how God provided for the people's thirst in the desert to get them on their way and move on in life. Often, it is in thinking back

we realise where in life the Lord has been with us and we give thanks. In thinking over the day that is ending, the people encountered, we come to realise where the Lord has been moving in or through us and others. Or we see where we have responded or not to God's call to 'strike the rock' for 'living water' to help relieve someone else's need and to make Jesus known in the world.

Especially we can give thanks for all we see and do to help each other during the difficult days in which we presently find ourselves.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will! weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

(Richard Gillard)

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