

2024-09-15 ... 6.30pm Evensong Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Exodus 18: 15-26; Matthew 7: 1-14

I've heard it said that every preacher only has one sermon in them. I know that the core belief that you will find behind all of mine is that **God is Good**. And not just benignly good but actively good.

For us this actively good begins with the creation

And within that comes humankind, whom God gave that characteristic we most of the time treasure so much - of freedom of will.

The incarnation of Jesus is the ultimate of that active engagement – or is it – perhaps it is the active engagement with each and everyone of us that is even more remarkable.

Always contributing good, Always bringing good into and out of bad.

Thank you God!

Our New Testament reading is the end of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. Three chapters absolutely packed with guidance on what the kingdom of God requires of us.

In Ch 7 v 12 we have the pinnacle of this mini manual 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you' There is nothing minimalist about this, it is not saying 'do no harm', it's imagine always how you would like to be treated – permission to dream big here – and do that for other people.

You'd think that was all the instruction we would need – one could also wonder why we need all the other hundreds of pages of the Bible!

Of course, with such an impossibly high standard – and after all, only God could think that we might be capable of matching up to God – and with the unreliability with which we apply our freewill, we need all sorts of support to help us think through all the less than perfect situations we create or find ourselves in.

So let us have a look at these few treasures we've heard tonight and perhaps we could set ourselves to ponder on them this week.

We start with judging – seeming the link with the Old Testament reading – I'm leaving that this week though because it seems quite straightforward.

And actually not with judging but with NOT judging! And we have the wonderful imagery of the plank in our eye. Once again we are asked to place ourselves in the mind of the other – How would we want to be treated – would the other understand why we did what we did –

We are told to self-reflect, to be aware of ourselves, of our behaviour, and to sort that out. What these couple of verses don't remind us of is that our God is a forgiving God. If we look into ourselves and find things that we don't on reflection like, our God is glad to help us dispose of those things, and to help us start afresh.

The next little bit about pearls and swine I'd like to skip over really, I think it's tricky and it makes me uncomfortable – I was reminded immediately on reading it about what Pippa was talking about last week – that there is no them and us in our faith. How we interpret this saying must bear that in mind. I'm attracted by a commentary by Barclay that there may be an early translation error involved here with the word 'holy' being switched in for the word 'ear-ring which would align the dogs and pigs but I do not have the expertise to critique this¹.

¹ <https://www.study-light.org/commentaries/eng/dsb/matthew-7.html>

The ask, seek and knock saying again reminds us that God is good and can safely be sought, can safely be petitioned. So do these things, encourage others to, because God will respond.

PTO

The narrow gate is an interesting one. We all have very different stories of our path to faith, you'd have thought that the way in was wide, but the nub of it is that we have each begun a relationship with Jesus. He is the gate. He is the path to understanding. He is the reason that we seek the path of holiness, he is the reason we seek to discard the plank in our eye, he is the reason we seek to do good to our neighbour, he is the treasure in our hearts. Amen.