

Reflection on Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30: 5th July 2020: Rev. Alexis Mahoney

This is a curious and interesting passage of Scripture which offers us both challenge, and comfort.

In the lead up to our passage for today, Jesus has been speaking highly of the importance of the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus tells us that John is the end of a long line of prophets looking forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is now here, in Jesus himself. And that John is the Elijah who has come prior to the Messiah.

And in our passage for today, both John, and even Jesus, suffer rejection by a generation acting like spoilt children. A generation who refuse to be satisfied by the wisdom of John and Jesus's words and ways, and who cannot seem to understand either of them. A generation who are more self-absorbed and interested in the wisdoms of their *own day* rather than the eternal wisdom of God.

And while we might try to distance ourselves from Jesus' observations here, if we're honest, too much sounds familiar to many of us. Too much rings true.

History repeats itself, doesn't it! Our society and culture, like the one Jesus was speaking to 2000+ years ago, are still fascinated and focussed on the powerful, the fashionable, the privileged, the influential; and we are still guided by the supposed 'wisdoms' of our time.

But when Jesus turns away from the people gathered and lifts a prayer to God, we begin to realize just how clearly *His* focus is centred. We realize that Jesus is not addressing the failure of individuals to respond to the coming of the Kingdom of God, but of society as a whole. And not only a society as a whole but an entire generation who fail to understand a message which is so utterly clear... The Kingdom of God is for "infants".

This contrasts with the spoilt and distracted children Jesus refers to at the beginning of the passage. The infants Jesus is referring to are the sort of people who are humble, innocent, simple, open, trusting. And it is these who Jesus says somehow understand best the ways of God. It is these who receive Christ in their hearts and minds the most readily.

The “infants” are also those who are the most likely to be far from positions of worldly power and influence.

The theologian Karl Barth advocates this strongly, and I think he encapsulates Jesus message so well here... He says, “the threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, widows, orphans, aliens... God always stands unconditionally and passionately on this side, and on this side alone. Against the lofty, and on behalf of the lowly. Against those who already enjoy rights and privileges, and on behalf of those who are denied and deprived of them”.

Our challenge is to stand alongside those with whom God stands alongside. To be the arms and legs and hands and feet and mind and heart for God in situations that need both our prayer, and our direct and care-full intervention...

And now our gospel reading for today offers us some very familiar and often used words of comfort, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”. And in the context of the first part of our scripture reading for today this surely should lead us to understand that, though we can be assured of Jesus’ presence at all times, Jesus is present more in times of need than times of plenty. That Jesus is present more in times of desperation than times of certainty.

Rest is not offered to the strongest and most powerful. Rest is offered to those who have been made weary by a world that fails to comprehend the burden of injustice. And the yoke is made easy by God coming to the aid of those whose ways this world fails to understand.

In short, any who believe that they are responsible for their own salvation, whether it be through military or political power and might, or whether it be through intellectual prowess or personal magnetism, have no need of the comforting arms of Jesus. Jesus will not trouble them with heaven’s gifts.

But to those of us who recognise their need for a Saviour, and those who are prepared to surrender themselves into the virtues of humility, simplicity, innocence and trust, Jesus comes! Jesus comes bringing peace, bringing comfort. Lifting life’s burdens and offering rest; even for the lonely soul!

Amen.