

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday 01/09/2024

Reading Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 / Ps 15/ James 1:17-27 / Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

Sermon Theme: *Right or Wrong?*

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### Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

<sup>1</sup> So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. <sup>2</sup> You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. <sup>6</sup> You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!' <sup>7</sup> For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? <sup>8</sup> And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? <sup>9</sup> But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—

### Ps 15

<sup>1</sup> Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle:  
or who may dwell upon your holy hill?  
<sup>2</sup> Whoever leads an uncorrupt life  
and does the thing which is right:  
who speaks the truth from the heart,  
and has not slandered with the tongue;  
<sup>3</sup> Who has done no evil to a friend:  
nor vented abuse against a neighbour;  
<sup>4</sup> In whose eyes the worthless have no honour:  
but who makes much of those that fear the Lord;  
<sup>5</sup> Whoever has sworn to a neighbour:  
and will not go back on that oath;  
<sup>6</sup> Who has not put money to usury:  
nor taken a bribe against the innocent.  
<sup>7</sup> Whoever does these things:  
shall never be overthrown.

### James 1:17-27

<sup>17</sup> Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. <sup>19</sup> You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for

your anger does not produce God's righteousness. <sup>21</sup> Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. <sup>25</sup> But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. <sup>26</sup> If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

### **Mark 7:1-8, 14-23**

<sup>1</sup> Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, <sup>2</sup> they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup> and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

<sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' <sup>6</sup> He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." <sup>8</sup> You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.' <sup>17</sup> When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, <sup>19</sup> since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

<sup>20</sup> And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,

<sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

<sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

### **SERMON.**

#### ***It's the law!***

How often have you heard that phrase?

But what is the law?

The law is a set of rules that ideally provide an order to the way things interact or work together. They allow us to live safely and freely by providing a foundation to the fabric of our relationships. Generally, there are negative personal and/or societal consequences if laws are broken or disregarded. Without rules chaos or anarchy would prevail as there would be no framework to measure the appropriateness of one action against another. Laws work because as a society we accept their intent, what some call the spirit of the law. Adhering to rules may well mean we do not get our way completely but must compromise for the greater good of all.

Today's scripture passages draw us to reflect not just on the rules we live by but importantly on how and why we keep them.

Learning rules is a part of growing that through experience I suspect, many of us are have stories which we have shared with our own children and others. By learning rules, we are better equipped to care for ourselves and others. We can protect ourselves and live harmoniously with others in communities. Some rules are common among families, across communities and cultures while others are more unique to the context.

Of course there is a danger that the purpose of rules in assisting us to live safely and freely can be forgotten and instead we become captives to the rules without understanding their purpose. This was the case for the Pharisees. Such inflexible application resulted in discrimination of the poor, the sick and anyone who was simply different.

The church also has rules. Religious rules are supposed to nurture our relationship with God. Moses in the Deuteronomy passage is encouraging the people to see the rules as a gift which, when understood brings wisdom and life. James and Jesus add to moses claim be telling us that rather than the law the source of it intent is a priority. In other words following a law for the sake of it being a law is meaningless when compared to living the law from our hearts.

How often have we given to the expectations of others simply to appear or feel good ourselves?

Worrying about how we are perceived by others is a natural and common trait among all of us. For example, who today took time to ensure that what they are wearing was clean, matching and orderly? .... Why? The desire to fit in will see us make compromises between our true self and a curated image of self that others will accept, and so accept us. It may even see us wilfully ignore rules we know to be wrong.

Currently we are reflecting on our generosity, our giving.

While we understand that being the church, missioning for Christ, there are cost which must be met, we are being told that simply meeting such cost because we see ourselves as having no choice, or being forced too, is the wrong attitude. With this attitude we will fester resentment and we will lose sight of the meaning of our generosity. As Christian we are called not to sacrifice because it is the law but because it is the desire of the heart. If through love of God we approach our giving with a true desire to make the gospel known then we will see fruit. It may not be what we personally expect but even trust is something we give.

Jesus tells us, justice and truth can only come from a sincere heart. His life is the example of this. Today we are challenged to match our actions to our faith and check if we really live as if God's law is all about love. Amen