

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora

18th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday 22/09/2024

Reading Proverbs 31:10-31 / Ps 1 / James 3:1-12 / Mark 9:30-37

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

Sermon Theme: *Knowing someone.*

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

Proverbs 31:10-31

- ¹⁰ A capable wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
- ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
- ¹² She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
- ¹³ She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
- ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from far away.
- ¹⁵ She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant-girls.
- ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength,
and makes her arms strong.
- ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
- ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- ²¹ She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- ²² She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- ²³ Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
- ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
- ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:
- ²⁹ 'Many women have done excellently,

but you surpass them all.'

³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

³¹ Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Ps 1

¹ Blessed are they
who have not walked in the counsel of the ungodly:
nor followed the way of sinners,
nor taken their seat amongst the scornful.

² But their delight is in the law of the Lord:
and on that law will they ponder day and night.

³ They are like trees planted beside streams of water:
that yield their fruit in due season.

⁴ Their leaves also shall not wither:
and look, whatever they do, it shall prosper.

⁵ As for the ungodly, it is not so with them:
they are like the chaff which the wind scatters.

⁶ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand up
at the judgement:
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
⁷ For the Lord cares for the way of the righteous:
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

James 3:1-12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴ Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed,

he will rise again.’³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’

SERMON.

Jesus keeps trying to escape notice.

We are moving quite fast through mark at the moment and unless we are reading Mark between each Sunday passages, we are missing some significant events. Jesus and his disciples have been journeying for some weeks through several towns before, in this week’s passage where he is back in Galilee.

Jesus has begun teaching his disciples about what awaits him in Jerusalem and about the cost of following him (Mark 8:27-38). Peter, James, and John, have witnessed the transfiguration where appearing in dazzling white clothes Jesus converses with Moses and Elijah (Mark 9:2-8). Referring to the death of John the Baptist, and clearly implying that he himself is the One for whom Elijah has prepared the way (Mark 9:9-13), Jesus has told his disciples that Elijah has already come, “and they did to him whatever they pleased,” He has cast a demon out of a boy that his disciples were not able to cast out (Mark 9:14-29).

Now in Galilee, and wanting to focus on teaching his disciples, Jesus tries to remain incognito. In a briefer form than in Mark 8:31, Jesus speaks again of what is to happen to him in Jerusalem: how “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again” (Mark 9:31), however, the disciples still do not understand, and they are afraid to ask any questions (Mark 9:32). There can be many reasons for this, however their fear of asking any questions means that they stay in their state of ignorance and confusion. Instead of seeking clarity, the disciples turn to arguing with each other.

When they arrive in Capernaum, Jesus asks what they were arguing about. They are silent, too embarrassed to admit that they had been arguing with each other about who was the greatest among them. Jesus, knows exactly what they have been discussing, and tries once again to teach them that the reign of God reverses the world’s ideas of “greatness.”

True greatness, Jesus says, is not to be above others, but to be least of all and servant of all. It is not to ascend the social ladder but rather descend it, taking the lowest place. It is not to seek the company of the powerful, but to welcome and care for those without status, such as the child that Jesus embraces and places before his disciples.

In any culture, children are vulnerable; they are dependent on others for their survival and well-being. In the ancient world, their vulnerability was magnified by the

fact that they had no legal protection. A child had no status, no rights. A child certainly had nothing to offer anyone in terms of honor or status. But it is precisely these little ones with whom Jesus identifies. "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:37).

One of the hardest things for any individual is to surrender to another.

Jesus has declared that in following the path him he will surrender unto death itself.

Being a Christian in 2024 at least for most of us here at St Peter's has in many respects been far less demanding than that of the early or especially the first century church. But I wonder, would we have responded any different to the disciples when Jesus spoke. Would we have had the courage to admit our lack of understanding? Would we have displayed the strength to ask Jesus to better explain?

All too often we hear of conflicts and wars. All too often the reasons from every side appear at times valid or even reasonable in the circumstances, but the question we should be asking is, why are we fighting? What is our agenda?

How often does the answer boil down to a difference that we are afraid to explore, or worse fear that we might not be as full in our understanding as we had believed and so may be challenged to reflect and even restate our understanding.

Christian theology has attempted to provide explanations for the "why," and certain of these explanations have been read back into the Gospel texts. But the fact is that Jesus does not explain the "why". We can only deduce the "why" in reading the Gospel narrative.

Today, Jesus arrives proclaiming that the reign of God has come near, calling for repentance as John the Baptist did, but also, healing diseases and disabilities, and forgiving sins.

Throughout his ministry, he associates with the last and the least in society — insisting that those with authority and power do the same, and for this, he is condemned by the religious authorities, who decide that he is too dangerous and must be eliminated.

We need to understand that Jesus did not die *in order for* God to be gracious and to forgive sins. Jesus dies *because* he declares the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died *because* he associates with the impure and the worst of sinners. Jesus died *because* the religious establishment cannot tolerate the radical grace of God that Jesus proclaims and lives.

The radical grace of God that Jesus proclaims and lives completely obliterates the world's notions of greatness based on status, wealth, achievement, etc. Perhaps that is one reason we resist grace so much. It is much more appealing to be great on the world's terms than on Jesus' terms. Greatness on Jesus' terms means being humble, lowly, and vulnerable as a child. Greatness on Jesus' terms is risky; it can even get a person killed. But as Jesus teaches repeatedly, his way of greatness is also the path of life. AMEN