

Wirksworth Team Ministry 2007-8

WEDNESDAY 07 November 2007

Jesus and consumerism

Jesus' example

- Luke 9:58. Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.
- Mark 6:8-11; Luke 10:4-12. Take nothing except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ... Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.
- Luke 22:35. 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' They answered, 'Nothing.'
- Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-32. Don't worry about life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear ... Look at the birds of the air ... And why worry about clothes? See the lilies of the field ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness ...
- Matthew 6:19-20. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ...
 - What is behind these instructions?
 - How do we enter the kingdom of God?
 - What have children to do with it?

Redistribution

- Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-30. Go, sell everything you have ... How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ... eye of needle ... no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.
- Render to Caesar but is *anything* Caesar's?
 - What is idolatry? Can attitudes be idols?

Parables

- Matthew 20:1-16. Labourers in the vineyard.
- Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27. Talents parable. How do you interpret that?
 - Effects of consumerism on big business? On environment? On you and me?
 - Do we do damage when we take what we don't need? What is need? What would happen if we stopped using the word need and instead used the word lack? The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I lack nothing. Different implications?
 - Seven deadly sins – and the greatest of these is

Consumerism and business

- Three barriers to successful business: 'freedom, family, religion' (Mr Burns, *The Simpsons*).
 - Is consumerism idolatry? Why do you need a new jumper, or a new kitchen?
 - What sort of message do we give to children who are happy to play with cardboard boxes when we insist on giving them the latest gadget-toy instead?
 - What happens when someone who cherishes affluence encounters the lowly Jesus? What happens when someone who bleeds red-white-and-blue encounters the subversive Jesus? What happens when the contented consumer meets the simple Christ?
 - What is freedom? Freedom to do something? Freedom from something?

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WEDNESDAY 02 January 2008

Jesus the radical subversive

Raymond Brown: 'If one takes the Gospels at face value (and even if one examines them through the microscope of historical criticism), there emerges a Jesus capable of generating intense dislike ... he would be offensive on any religious scene'.

Parables

- Gracious/prodigal father/son. Spendthrift younger son. Older son's conventional reaction: understandable but questioned.
- Good Samaritan. Conventionally despised Samaritan as model of compassion. Criticizes conventional values that led priest and Levite to pass by.
- Wicked tenants. Directed against ruling elites of power and wealth. Political criticism explicit.
- Kingdom parables: not about heaven, afterlife, but life on earth. Kingdom come on earth as it is ...
 - Mark 4.30: something great begins as something small; a weed that spreads out of control.
 - Mark 4.26: seed growing secretly, leaven spreading through flour.
 - Matt. 13.44: worth selling everything and letting go of everything.
 - Luke 9.59: worth leaving the land of the dead – that is, not looking back.
 - Luke 14.16: banquet includes marginalized, excludes those caught up in life as normal.
 - Mark 12.1: includes children, 'nobodies' in that world. Stands in judgment of elites who create and shape domination systems in their own interest.
- Talents: risk taking, courage.
- Render to Caesar.
- Parables invite hearers to see life differently: God, politics, social order.
 - 'Jesus used parables and Jesus was put to death. The two facts are related.' Executed because his message and activity challenged the domination system of his day, a system that combined conventional wisdom with economic and political oppression.
 - Parables spoke of subversive and alternative vision of a life centered in the Kingdom of God.

A few other issues

- Women: Martha and Mary; Mary Magdalene; women at the cross: where were the disciples?
- Universality of message: not just the circumcised. Romans and Jews both offended.
- Family. 'Hate'. Completely separate yourself from who you are and how you live now.
- My yoke is easy and my burden light: subversive to the 'holy Joes.'
- Take responsibility for yourself.
- Take risks.
- Possessions are seductive; we confuse 'need' with 'desire'. The evil advertising industry.

Comments

- Romans 12:2. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world ...
- Clowns. Followers should excel in foolishness.
- Christian faith demands a surrender of who we are and the place we hold in this world.
- Jesus: came to help those who needed helping; lived in a world that used power, violence and fear to control; lived a life that challenged every foundation that supported his world; was never preoccupied with how others would react to him.
- Schweitzer: Jesus provoked his own death.
- Poster depicting Jesus as Che Guevara with a crown of thorns instead of a beret, against a shocking red background. Slogan: 'Meek. Mild. As If. Discover the real Jesus.'
http://www.rejesus.co.uk/expressions/faces_jesus/gallery/che.html

I have been unable to find any mention of an easy or comfortable life in Holy Scripture. Is it not the job of us all to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable?

Jesus and Ambition

Definition: Ambition :- *The eager or inordinate desire of honour or preferment. To desire strongly. Ostentation; pride of state.*

Have you been driven by ambition? Is it a constant state or temporary? Is it inherent or implanted? If it was implanted, then by whom and for what reason?

Jesus teaching – contradictory messages:

For:

The parable of the talents Matthew 25: 14-30

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. (Matthew 5: 16) A suitable justification or a fig leaf for those wishing to be bishops.....or popes ?

American evangelism vs modest Anglicanism - which one serves Christ best?

Against:

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 5) Blessed are the meek (not the ambitious?)

Those who would rule must be the servants (Matthew 20:25-28)

Don't get above yourself ... Jesus' advice to wedding guests "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14: 8-11)

How are we taught to see ambition?

"These days are dangerous, virtue is chok'd with foul ambition and charity chas'd forth by rancours hand" Shakespeare – Henry IV part 2, act 3

Or is criticism of ambition a foil - Falstaff

Is Christianity a religion of enforced mediocrity, of repressed desire? a gathering of Uriah Heaps?

Does the Christian demand to deny oneself also lead to a denial of one's potential?

Is ambition the desire that dares not speak its name?

Worldly vs unworldly ambition e.g. Politicians vs clergy (Php 1:17)?

Is it always a base desire or can it have higher motives? Hildegard of Bingen, Mother Teresa – ambitious women in a man's world?

Tipping points – Can we define them? (James 3: 14)

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WEDNESDAY 30 January 2008

Jesus, forgiveness, liberation

Forgiveness is the central message of Christianity

- When OT prophets declaim God's judgement, they denounce those actions that signify a breaking of the covenant with God. The emphasis shifts in the New Testament: Jesus' earthly ministry demonstrates compassion towards all that encounter him (Mark 6:37).
- God is rich in mercy and full of forgiveness for those who come back to him (Ezekiel 18:23; Psalm 32:5; Psalm 103:8-14; Ephesians 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3).
- Gracious father parable. Herbert's *Love bade me welcome* (see over).
- Disciples commissioned to forgive sins: primary function?

Need for forgiveness

- We are all bound to fail because we set such a premium on success. 'If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.'
- A wounded world yearns for healing. Inner loneliness. Discrimination. Poverty. Lives of quiet desperation. Commercialism, consumerism, advertising and its temptations.
- Am I my brother's keeper? Genesis 4:9. When so many of our brothers and sisters are suffering, can we remain indifferent? Are we implicated?

Calvin: two kinds of forgiveness

- guilt admitted, forgiveness sought and granted, right relationship restored. Ideal, but not cheap.
- guilt not admitted, forgiveness not sought. Calvin said forgiveness possible in the sense that you let go of your anger and bitterness and refuse to let the hurt dominate your own life. Relationship remains broken.

Difficulty of forgiving

- arises from the circumstances of the present.
- arises from history.
- respect for differences is necessary condition for genuine relationships. The suppression of differences can result in apparent peace, but creates a volatile situation.

Prerequisites for forgiveness

- Truth. Evil must be acknowledged and as far as possible corrected. So what about amnesties?
- Justice: looks to re-establishing authentic relationships with God, with oneself and with others.
- Any more? Repentance?
- South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

- hardest bit of the Lord's Prayer – we have to be willing to change.
- can I ask to be forgiven unless I forgive? 'as' implies the measure with which we shall be judged. Story of the King's servant.
- When I feel forgiven it changes me and all my relationships because it changes the way I relate to the world.
- Are we then forgiven for ever?

From whom do we need forgiveness?

- Forgiving oneself. Refusal to do so is arrogance.

Forgiveness and guilt

- What matters to Jesus is not sin and wrongdoing, but repentance. Gracious father. Prostitute. The light bulb has to want to change.
- Eckhart: Truly to have committed a sin is not sinful if we regret what we have done.
- Forgiveness and punishment: 'a bottomless well of uncritical forgiveness would devalue virtue.' 'Love and caring do not remove the obligation for personal effort.'

Guilt

- Doing wrong offends against ourselves. Guilt is the refusal, from the beginning of human history until now, to accept God's offer of self. Guilt is not merely a feeling of remorse about this or that sinful act. It's a rejection of God. The one who refuses God's self-communication refuses true freedom.
- Human freedom is never complete. We always act within a context imposed by history. Original sin/guilt. Not personal, but universal: history marked by repeated failures to respond to God's call. This guilt is radical: it threatens root of human freedom.
- Young offenders have to live with guilt. Sheppard: 'a brassy exterior often hides deep feelings of inadequacy.'

Punishment

- Paul warns against harshness (Romans 14, 15) and advises that decision-making should be for the good of the community (1 Corinthians 10).
- Forgiveness neither eliminates nor lessens the need for the reparation which justice requires, but seeks to reintegrate individuals and groups into society, and States into the community of Nations. No punishment can suppress the inalienable dignity of those who have committed evil. The door to repentance and rehabilitation must always remain open.

Liberation

- Luke 15:11-32: father does not even let the son apologize: healing.
- Forgiveness frees us from the tyranny of disabling guilt. 'Instead of the good things I want to do, I end up doing the bad things I don't want to do.' Romans 7:19.
- Forgiveness starts in your own heart. It's a gift you give because you want to be set free from the inner torment of living with negative feelings toward other people. How others respond is a secondary issue.
- What takes place in me when I accept it does not affect me only—it affects all those with whom I come in contact because it changes the way I relate to everyone and everything.
- Paul: the only way to change a human heart is acceptance and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32
- My yoke is easy and my burden is light: what does this mean?

Some quotes

- Dag Hammarskjöld: Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean.
- Lewis Smedes (Calvinist theologian): To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.
- Marlene Dietrich: Once a woman has forgiven her man, she must not rehear his sins for breakfast.
- Oscar Wilde: Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much.
- Mignon McLaughlin (journalist): True remorse is never just a regret over consequence; it is a regret over motive.
- And finally, the Blessed George
 - He that cannot forgive others, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone has need to be forgiven
 - Though my sins against me cried, Thou alone didst clear me; And alone, when they replied, Thou didst hear me.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, Guiltie of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here: Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare, I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame? My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat: So I did sit and eat.

Wirksworth Team Ministry 2007-8 WEDNESDAY 13 February 2008

Jesus and prayer

How did Jesus pray?

- Early: Mk 1:35. Late: Lk 6:12. Often: Lk 5:16. 22:39.
- Before critical events in His life. Lk 3:21-22. Lk 6:12-13. Lk 9:28-29. Lk 22:39-42. Lk 23:34.
- Before, during and after ministering to others. Lk 3:21-22. Mk 1:35. Lk 11:1. Mt 11:25-26 Mt 19:13. Mt 14:23.
- Before miracles/healings. Mk 1:35. Mk 6:41. Mk 7:34. Jn 11:41-43.
- For others: Lk 22:32; Jn 17:9-16; Jn 17:20; Lk 23:34. For us: Hebrews 7:25.
- Alone, in a quiet place, with deep emotion, force and persistence. Mt 14:23. Mt 26:36. Mk 1:35. Lk 5:16. Hebrews 5:7. And many more. Without hypocrisy, without long prayers. Mt 23:14.
- Jesus' *instructions*: Mt 6:5-18. In your room, alone, shut the door. No vain repetitions. Our Father ... When you fast, don't boast, don't draw attention to yourself. Persistently: Lk 18:1-8.

How did the apostles pray?

- Acts 10:9. Peter prayed in private.
- 1 Thess 5:17. Paul: Pray without ceasing.
- Acts 1:14. Pray together. Paul likes long prayers.
- 1 Cor 11:5-15. Women's heads covered, or else shorn. Man's head uncovered.

Difficult issues

- Is there a conflict between Jesus and Paul?
- What is the place of intercessory prayer in public worship? Why do we do it *at all*?
- Is there a difference between saying private devotions together and corporate worship? 8 am vs 9.30 am services? Why is there so much emphasis on *corporate* when Jesus dealt with *individuals*?
- Is God someone who won't do anything unless you ask? 'I'll cure this leukaemia because they've asked, but not that one.'
- If you are asking for specific things, are you bargaining with God?

Some answers?

- Raymond Raynes: Prayer 'does not change God's purpose, it releases it' – it is 'the key that unlocks the forces of good in the world.' It's almost as if God will not achieve his purpose without our action.
- CS Lewis: prayer doesn't change God, it changes me.
- Anthony Bloom: 'Intercession means an involvement that may spell death, and I am frightened when I hear a congregation of people intercede for one need after the other ... just for the time Evensong lasts.' There's no point in praying for something unless we are prepared to change.

How to pray?

- Didache (80-90 AD): Linked with fasting; bless those who curse you, pray for enemies, fast for those who persecute you; in church, acknowledge your transgressions; don't pray with an evil conscience; fast on fourth day and Preparation. Don't pray like hypocrites ... ; pray LP three times a day.
- Working. Doing your job well. Singing is praying twice. Tending creation. Creating. Using your God-given intellect – ratiocination – discernment.
- Godly conversation. God-directed thoughts: communing with ourselves (God within). Ranting at God. We must be honest with God and with ourselves. Everything is not nice. Job.
- LISTEN to God. You won't hear God unless in prayer you SHUT UP. Michael Ramsey.
- Discipline. Prayer books. Liturgy. Litany. This does not suit everyone. Personality types.
- Jesus prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy upon me a sinner.
- No special posture needed. On the toilet – biological justification for this!
- Repetitive actions. Actions imprint things into our brains. Prayer wheel. Rosary. Brain chemistry.
- Have ministers maintained it's more difficult than it really is in order to preserve their mystique?

Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquillity, the root of a multitude of blessings, and their source. St John Chrysostom

Wirksworth Team Ministry 2007-8

WEDNESDAY 27 February 2008

Jesus and healing

This topic has deliberately been left till last.

Why might someone wandering around Palestine attract crowds?

Jesus the

- preacher
- subversive
- teacher
- mythical hero
- Hellenistic philosopher
- revolutionary
- wisdom sage
- man of the Spirit
- social prophet
- apocalyptic prophet
- Saviour
- Jewish Cynic.

Is there a unifying characteristic?

What is healing? It is medical cure? Is it to make as new? Are our expectations realistic? Is it to do with attitudes?

Can healing occur without scarring?

Salve, s(h)alom, peace, liberate, enlighten, redeem: all = ??

Jesus went about healing and doing good. Acts 10:38.

Who is doing the healing? Does it come at a cost?

Healing miracles: any common features?

Jesus dealt with individuals: is this significant? So what is the role of the parish priest? Coordinator? Administrator? Strategist?

We all have our images of Jesus. Is any of them the whole truth?

How can anyone claim to *know* Jesus?

The Quest of the Historical Jesus by Albert Schweitzer (1906), last paragraph:

'He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.'