

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 22 September 2024 - The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Mark 9:30-37 Wisdom 1.16-2.1 and 12-22; or Jeremiah 11.18-20

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Phil Marsh, Priest in Charge, Ely Benefice

I wonder if you have ever seen the 'Class sketch' starring John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett? If you haven't it is well worth a google at some time or other, but for now it is enough to know that the sketch revolves around each person in the English class system knowing their 'place'. I wonder where we would assign ourselves in the pecking order? The sketch in question was first broadcast in an episode of David Frost's satirical comedy programme *The Frost Report* in 1966.

John Cleese, tall and patrician in appearance and demeanour, represents the upper class. Ronnie Barker, of average height, the middle class, and Ronnie Corbett, short in stature, the working class. Their dress also shows class distinction: Cleese in a slim-cut suit and bowler hat, Barker in loose-cut suit and homburg hat, and Corbett in a workman's jacket, scarf, and flat cap. Each in turn describes their social advantages and disadvantages, and compares themselves with their neighbours, an effect emphasised by the actors' different heights as they look downwards or upwards to each other, and each chain of comparisons ends up with the diminutive Ronnie Barker at the end of the line, lower than other two, remarking – "I know my place". The sketch is worth revisiting but I won't spoil the punchline here – {NB although if you had the means to show it in the sermon you could certainly do so}.

I wonder whereas Christians we might consider our place to be?

In our Gospel reading today it is all a little awkward. In Mark's gospel, from Chapter 8 onward we are headed towards Jerusalem, and Jesus has begun teaching the disciples that he must be betrayed and handed over into the hands of the pharisees and the teachers of the law and that he will die. It would be fair to say the disciples do not deal well with this idea, and certainly seem to struggle to grasp it. We should probably cut them some slack. We view the whole thing through the lens of knowing about Christ's death and resurrection. For them, the idea that the messiah, for that is who they have come to realise Jesus is, would die is somewhat nonsensical. What appears to have happened from our reading is that it sends the disciples into a bit of a tailspin, and they debate it and even argue about it on the road as they travel. And they do so away from Jesus. And perhaps rightly so, for we see from verse 34, that they have kept their conversation apart from Jesus for they have been arguing about who is the greatest.

You see what I mean about awkward? Jesus tells them he is going to have to die... and they argue about which of them is the greatest!!!! We might surmise from other gospel passages that the backdrop to this conversation is at least some rudimentary understanding of Jesus as messiah establishing God's kingdom and ruling and reigning, but either way, their argument around questions of their own greatness is pretty crass.

Before we look at how Jesus responds to this, I can't help but notice that this conversation apart from Jesus arises out of a lack of understanding – and a fear of owning that. V 32 they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. Perhaps even here we get a glimpse of the disciple's concern about their standing with Jesus, and with one another. Perhaps not wanting to look foolish from their lack of understanding or wanting to avoid getting it wrong like Peter had just days earlier. What if they'd plucked up their courage and fronted with Jesus their lack of understanding. What if they hadn't hived themselves off from him on the road? I'm left wondering whether or not there is a picture here of what happens when we seek to walk or travel through stuff in our own strength and understanding rather than relying on Christ, whether or not we like the disciples end up cultivating all manner of faulty thinking and dodgy ideas about faith haven't come from Christ but from our own impoverished views of ourselves and the world.

Well, lets return to the question of how Jesus responds to this argument of who is the greatest among them.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

This perhaps is very familiar. It of course points to Christ's own giving of self in service. We might recall Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and telling them no servant is above his master, as I have done so for you, now do for one another.

But pay careful attention here. You may also be thinking that this is where Jesus says you must receive the kingdom of God **Like** a little child in order to enter it. Jesus does say that in Matthew 18:3 and Mark 10:15, **BUT that is NOT what Jesus is saying here!!!!**

Read it again... Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name..... this is to observe, notice, give value to, give worth to the smallest and the least among you. In the context of their day children had absolutely no rights or formal standing in any way at all. Jesus is declaring that if you want to be great in the kingdom of God, you must serve even the smallest and the least.

This is not merely a cute way of telling us to value children in church. Though it does do that, and we would do well to increase our willingness to change our beloved and cherished forms of service to better welcome families and to better engage children, but this teaching of Jesus is even more radical than that.

Are we willing to lower ourselves to become the servants of all. To become the servants of the least, in his name. Will you cut back on your shopping this week, so that you can put food in the foodbank collection point at your local supermarket? Will you have one less drink at the pub this month so you can give three quid to a charity meeting the needs of those facing famine in Sudan? Will you turn off the TV and sit and listen to a family member tell you about their day, even though you are tired yourself? Or perhaps ring an older member of the congregation to see how they are doing. Or invite someone you know who is on their own round for lunch? Will you be more careful about your electricity use knowing that the people global warming most effects are the most impoverished nations of the world?

I don't know what serving the least might look like for you. My guess is that for all of us it will involve giving up some time, some privilege, some energy, perhaps finance, perhaps personal comforts, or something similar, because ultimately it involves laying something of our selves down to lift up another.

In the Class sketch Ronnie barker at the bottom of the chain declared that he knew his place. Jesus humbled himself to serve even the lowliest and calls us as his followers and his friends to do the same.

May we pray.

Heavenly Father, Good Father of us all,

Bend our heart and minds that we might serve others as Jesus did

That we might love as Christ Loves,

And that we may in each of our hearts and minds,

Reflect the attitude of Christ

In your Holy name we pray

And by the grace of your Spirit

Amen

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?

- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Loving God, we come before you with hearts open to serve:

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Lord, guide your Church we pray. Help us to welcome all, especially the overlooked, with open arms. May we have courage to ask questions when we don't understand, and the humility to learn from one another. Grant wisdom to our leaders as they shepherd your flock, that we may all grow in faith and love.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Creator of all, we pray for a world divided by wealth and status. We pray for this who face poverty and famine. For those fleeing from war and corruption. Open our eyes to see the dignity in every human being and inspire leaders, government and us all alike to work for justice, to lift up the lowly, and to create societies where all are valued.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Father God, we ask for your blessing on our local community. Help us to see and serve the needs around us, whether through food banks, charity work, or simple acts of kindness. May we be attentive to the lonely, the marginalized, and those struggling in our midst. Give us the strength to put others before ourselves, following Christ's example.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Compassionate God, we lift up to you all who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit. Comfort those in pain, bring peace to the anxious, and hope to the despairing. Guide the hands and hearts of all caregivers. May the sick know your presence and feel your healing touch.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Finally Lord, as we approach the changing of seasons, remind us that our call to serve is constant. As leaves fall keep us steadfast in your love, that we might share it generously with others. As the trees let go of their leaves, help us to let go of our own sense of importance, trusting in the new life to come, that we might give of ourselves more freely to the world around us.

We pray Lord God for the grace to truly know our place – not in worldly hierarchies, but as your beloved children, called to serve one another in love. May we, like Christ, be willing to humble ourselves for the sake of others, finding true greatness in service.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Servant King. **Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

- "The Servant King" (From Heaven You Came) by Graham Kendrick
- "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" (Prayer of St. Francis)
- "Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You" by Richard Gillard
- "Here I Am, Lord" by Dan Schutte
- "The Summons" (Will You Come and Follow Me) by John Bell
- "Meekness and Majesty" by Graham Kendrick
- "God of Justice" by Tim Hughes
- "Build Your Kingdom Here" by Rend Collective
- "Take My Life and Let It Be" by Frances R. Havergal
- "Beauty for Brokenness" (God of the Poor) by Graham Kendrick
- "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong Worship
- "All Are Welcome" by Marty Haugen

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.com) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)