

## St P&P 27.7.14

Matthew 13. 44-52

*Loving Heavenly Father, meet with us as we study your word this morning. Help us to understand, help us to learn and send your Holy Spirit to move our hearts in response to your truth. In Jesus name. Amen*

I can never understand why people go in for quizzes on TV or radio. You know the sort of thing -from 'mastermind' to 'who wants to be a millionaire' or 'the weakest link'

When you watch them from the comfort of your armchair you can do most of the questions -indeed you may find yourself saying 'surely everyone knows that'

But under the lights, with half the nation watching -well I for one would find my mind going blank, and even the simplest questions would slip from my grasp. Sometimes a teacher or professor takes part, and you think about the hard time his students will give him when they get back.

And anyway...even if you found you could overcome your nerves, it's a strange thing to want to do. You are really saying 'look at me! I'm everso clever' - risky, boastful and rather tasteless. Do you agree?

Of course the most you can say of the winner is that they have a very good memory.

You might call the winner of Mastermind clever -but you wouldn't dream of calling them 'wise'

In fact it's fairly clear that people can be very clever but less than wise.

We had the ultimate prime example with Clinton. Ex -President Clinton is a very clever man. A friend of mine was at a meeting with him and was bowled over by how clever he was. He summarised the points of view to perfection, he made practical proposals and he spoke in a clear and persuasive manner.

But of course as we all know he was incapable of keeping his trousers on.

When the Monica Lewinsky story first broke, I expect you, like me, thought...'how could he have been so stupid?'

Surely he could have seen that the consequences of his actions would be dire -his political credibility shattered, his marriage under grave threat, trust betrayed, authority

undermined.

How could he be so stupid?

Don't confuse being clever with being wise.

Our reading from Matthew this morning is talking about the kingdom of heaven. It follows on from last week when Jesus was explaining that in the time before the final judgement we all live in a world which is a mixture of good and evil. The wheat and the tares. This applies to the world, it applies to the life of the church -we all know that we have our churches full of sinners, and it applies to our own life. Internally we are all a mixture of good and evil.

We all know that.

But one of the main things that Jesus is stressing here is that in the end, it is the inner truth of our lives which will count -and that we all have to be realistic about what that inner truth is -because in the end it will be exposed.

We can be clever. We can give everyone the impression that all is well -but that falls far short of being wise.

Being wise consists of being able to see the truth. Not the bare facts, not the mask of a person, the bits they want you to see -but the real, inner truth.

In other words...these stories of Jesus remind us that God sees the real us.

And you can't get anything by him. Most especially you can't get any hypocrisy past him.

That means, I'm afraid, that you can turn up to church for half a century, say all the psalms and canticles and what not - recite the confession and the creed...and it will all prove a monumental waste of time if, when God looks into your heart, he does not see true faith and love.

The parable of the net -where all the fish came up in one catch -that's all of us here at judgement day -well there was a grand sorting out. Jesus expects this to make us pull up short and really think 'which pile of fish would they chuck us on?'

We may well rush up telling him we have been to church every week for sixty-five years, and done our turn on PCC and cleaned the floor and polished the light fittings...these are the facts and in a court of law they would be very good evidence for you good Christian character.

But God justice is not like a court of law. You may have behaved impeccably, but that is secondary. The first issue is your heart -not how others see it but how God sees it. And I tell you, that is far, far more clearly than we see it ourselves.

Now if all this makes you feel queasy -well rightly so. Which one of us would open up our hearts here this evening and expect to get a clean bill of health? Which one of us is not guilty of hypocrisy, ulterior motives, of just going through the form, of confessing half-heartedly, of holding on to a grudge - which one of us can claim always and in all circumstances that we have loved the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our minds and with all our strength? Of course not! Like all other churches this one is full of a bunch of sinners.

We are all sinners. Being a sinner can't be helped -its the human condition -and in a way that's not the problem. The problem comes when we deceive ourselves and other people - when we con ourselves and others that we are good and pure and holy. When you reach that point then you exclude yourself from the love and forgiveness of God because you feel you don't really need it.

And that my friends is the tragedy in the pews and in the pulpits of churches around the country. Not that they are full of sinners but that they are so often full of hypocrites.

You've probably heard the joke:

Zig Ziglar said that he invited a friend to go to church with him. The man answered, "Well, I'd like to go. But the church is so full of hypocrites." Ziglar replied, "That's okay. There's always room for one more."

On a more serious note CS Lewis wrote on this matter, pointing out that when people become Christians, if they are not careful, their sinning often shifts from the overt, outward, visible sins of lying, cheating, stealing, cursing and swearing, to the more inward, hidden, non-apparent invisible ones ... and among them he lists "a critical spirit" ... a spirit of judgmentalism, a censorious attitude. In fact, he points out that this sin is one of the transgressions that is more commonly committed by church people than by those who are not. So prevalent is it in churchly circles that it is sometimes labelled "Christian cruelty."

Now of course, of course we don't ever fool God with our mean spirited, covert sins. What we do is cause untold pain and grief to our brothers and sisters, and worst of all, we cut ourselves off from the love and the grace that God longs to give us.

I suppose you could put it this way. Being honest about yourself, being honest before God about your failings and you need of him -is in your own best interest.

You may well have heard long theological discourses on what constitutes the unforgivable sin.

The bible calls it quenching the spirit -but you could call it denial -any sin becomes unforgivable once you deny it's existence. And the consequences are dire. Sin that lies deep in your heart -seen of course by God, but denied by self -that sin gradually eats away at you, not unlike the way a cancer does, making you tired, draining away your vigour, slowly but surely spoiling your life.

You have to think....'what's the point?' Why try to hide from myself that which God can see so clearly?

You are probably thinking by now -go easy Rosie....this is all rather heavy and uncomfortable. And you're right ...it is.

It was just as bad last week .it's the theme of the month. The farmer who sowed wheat - and then saw that someone had planted weeds in amongst it. Wheat and weeds growing in the same field, but the wheat was of value and the weeds, though they were left for the time being, would end up on the bonfire. Now this week all those fish, swimming in the same sea -some good, some bad.

However.....however, we have not yet taken account of our other reading -the wonderful passage from Romans 8.

It's **grace** again you see. It is honesty before God that counts. And it is our faith, however small that will put us amongst the wheat rather than the tares, the good fish rather than the bad. Not earned -given.

St. Paul is telling us that if being honest about ourselves makes us only too aware of our weakness -and that's certainly the effect being honest has on me -we need have no fear.

Listen again to his words:

verse 26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searched our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for all the saints in accordance with God's will."

Then comes that famous, that oft quoted verse...verse 28" We know that in all things God works for the good of those who *love* him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

Today is not the day for exploring the theology of these famous words -but there is no doubt that the central message is that it is in the *loving of God* that you make sense, and give purpose to the rest of your life. What ever happens, whatever you have to live through, ultimately by loving and trusting God you will be in his hands and you will discover that his purpose for your life is good, and faithful and loving.

I guess his morning is a wake up call. We all need it now and then. Watch out that your faith has not become an empty shell. It happens all too easily -to any of us....and the consequences are bitter.

The good news is that God longs not to judge but to forgive. A bit of honesty - about ourselves, and before God, and though we don't deserve it in any way, he will welcome

us back with open arms. I know its summer now, but a touch of spring-cleaning of the soul might do each one of us good. It might be painful at the time, but God will fill the cleared out space with new love and peace -and how we would all welcome that! **Amen**