

Not far from the Kingdom

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

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Our portion from the Gospel is a curious one. For the most part, those who came to Jesus to ask question of Jesus did so to try and trap him or to at least to have him affirm their own prejudice.

- Is it Lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
- If a woman marries seven brothers - whose wife is she at the resurrection?
- Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Yet this encounter appears from a genuine inquirer after truth. We must be careful not to judge all scribes and all pharisees by those who opposed Jesus. Many of them were genuine in seeking truth and it was really those concerned with political power or position that sought to bring Jesus undone.

When Jesus encountered this man with the genuine love for truth, he commended him and assured him of his progress towards his goal. It was not only Jesus' wise answers that silenced the critics, but his perception of the reasons behind them that made it difficult to ask him anything. Those playing political games were exposed by the words of Jesus.

Now, I do not wish to be disrespectful about politicians, for I have got to know a few, and I am convinced that they genuinely seek to improve our world, but the problem is that sooner or later truth becomes the casualty of politics. This is especially so in the case of party politics, where the party line should be toed at all cost and compromise is the answer rather than truth. Rest assured, there are many in politics who have stood up on the matter of principal and have sacrifice their careers for the sake of what is their core belief, but the system as we have it has built in flaws in order for it to work.

But I am not here to bewail the inadequacies of our system of government. Perhaps what concerns me is the continual invasion of politics into the church. It is power rather than service is sought and the movement to identifiable factions or parties, promoted by certain elements within the diocese of Sydney and taken up by people here in South Australia that can only be seen as evil.

Truth is often sacrificed for political point scoring. Synod last week was no such event. Only one person tried to big note themselves at the expense of others. But when clergy and Christian leaders enter into the world of politics, they will sooner or later sacrifice truth. Indeed, they will cease to seek truth, preferring to stick with their chosen party line. Scripture is bent to support a position rather than informing opinion. Jesus spoke of them quoting Isaiah "For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn — and I would heal them.'

And then he commends those listening to him: "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

In our Anglican Church, we have a huge danger that political position will supplant truth. Our problems are not financial but are as the result of pursuing political goals. As we have become more and more politicised in the wider church, our resources have dried up. There is a fundamental truth, "That God's work, never is short of resources". The shortfall is only when we fail to discern where God would have us be. The purchase of Poatina by Fusion is one such case in point. They identified what it was that God was calling them to do with an opportunity before them, and acted, and God has supplied what is needed. God does not give us 1 million in the bank and then tell us to act. Rather he asks us to act in faith trusting that he will supply what is needed.

So we are not called to play politics and garner support for our projects. We are called to take risks based on faith, looking to God to supply our needs.

Thus I; the church and district councils; and indeed every congregation are called to seek the truth. We are called to identify why God has placed us here. We are called to ignore the bank balance and seek the vision.

I believe that we are not far from the kingdom, but that new challenge before us is to act in faith. And this is how faith works. It is little by little, that we will build confidence as we see God honouring our faith when we venture out.

I am constantly amazed by our Ministry Units in Willochra. We are a miracle. Perhaps it is stubbornness that has kept us here, but we believe in ourselves and our purpose is to be here. There is a special place in God's heart for the vulnerable, for the less powerful, for the least. Oft times, God shames the powerful by the least. Let us then together, you and I, build on the foundation of faith that is our existence and go one step further. Let us stretch our faith to do even more for God.

But let us begin and acknowledge the generosity of God towards us and ask for the gift of faith and vision.

Let us pray.

Jehovah Jirah - our Generous God, we thank you for your goodness in the past and your promise to supply all our needs. Give to us as a parish faith to act beyond our sight and a vision of your truth to guide us, that we might see your work done to your glory in this place. Amen.

AMEN