

Anticipating the future

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (OS 25C)

Published in the Ministry District of Yorke Peninsula

Sunday, September 18, 2022

You cannot serve two masters! You cannot serve God and wealth! Perhaps one of the difficulties in following Jesus, is that he tended to say hard things. Things that make us look at the way we are living and cringe - He said Turn the other cheek, Sell all that you have, Love your enemies, If you look at a women with lust - you have already committed adultery in your mind walk the second mile. You must hate, your brothers, sisters, mother, father yea even your own life. Take up your cross and follow me...

Now from a strict marketing point of view, Jesus doesn't make it easy for us to sell Christianity. In many ways we are called to live contrary to human nature's dictates. Our response is not to be the natural one, but one in which we are called to honour God, who loved us so much that even Jesus death was not to much to spend on our salvation.

But we have confused marketing with evangelism. Marketing is quite a science now days and it is quite possible to sell ice to Eskimos. Think of our advertising that we see and compare it to times past - Facts are irrelevant or at least of minor importance what is sold is a feeling, an image, a desire. And we have attempted to do this in the church as well. We have in God's name attempted to sell Christianity as a high, as a good time, like an insurance policy, as a source of power even as a type of club. As a consequence of this thinking we have ended up with the ridiculous situations where churches proclaim that 'My practice of faith is better than yours'. In times past when in the West Tamar parish, the Anglicans and the Uniting Church combined to share an evening service and opened it up to all Christians. One person from the local Pentecostal group came along and that was fine. Well it was fine until we found out he was going around all the new people and telling them that his church was so much better than the Anglicans or the Uniting Church people offered and they should come along next Sunday to their place of worship. He no doubt saw he was doing evangelism as in his eyes he was making the church grow. But he wasn't. He was adding to his congregation, people already in the church. Church growth nil.

By contrast, evangelism is not about the numbers game, but ensuring that people know that God loves them and how much. It is the very presence of the church in the community that proclaims it and our willingness to work to keep it there. Our ministry is not to add to our number, but to add to the number that know. There is great pressure on us to play this numbers game. After all, the minister must be paid etc etc. The diocesan assessment of the parish comes from the averages and does not look at the effectiveness of community engagement. I am aware that we have quite some way to go to obtain self-sufficiency. I was even told the other day that the church is finished here in Campbell Town, but I am not so sure. It will mean working together to achieve an end result, but this is where today's parable comes in.

Our Parable this morning, is one of the most difficult ones for us to get our heads around. At first glance, Jesus seems to be commending using an employer's wealth to feather our

own nest. To use what belongs to our employer, to provision our own future. While I worked at Temco, one of our buyers in purchasing was dismissed for doing exactly that.

But Jesus is not complementing the action, but the thought pattern behind it. Here is a man with a certain future (he will be dismissed) and he has no resources, so his focus in life is his future. He banks for his future - favours (at his master's expense). He is looking at what is to come, and not what has been.

Jesus point - if someone is so corrupt is so concerned about his future - What about the honest? Sadly, as Christians, we seem to give little evidence of any future viewpoint. How much of our resources - time and financial, are we putting into the future and how much are we putting into this life? We all face the certainty of death and judgement and the implication of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was that we should be concerned with storing up treasure in heaven. Our life as Christians is more than just this life's experience but implies the promise of something greater for us beyond the grave. So how much is it that we are focussed on this rather than into the present?

Jesus conclusion or warning that we cannot serve two masters is a reminder that we can choose to engage the world with the focus on this present life or that we can take the heavenly view. Wealth is the enemy, in that tends to replace God in our focus.

I ask you today, to begin with me to take the heavenly perspective. Let us look at our lives and our priorities and live them in such a way that we are working with heaven in mind. Let us build up our heavenly bank account not by good works alone, but by proclaiming the great truth of our faith - That Jesus Christ, Son of God, died for me.

Numbers will come as we need them, but more than getting people into church, we are about getting in and amongst the people. Our gathering is not as important as our sending out, but we gather to gain strength and encouragement for the process.

Think for a moment. How are you and I proclaiming our faith to the people of this place? I am not about to ask you to grab a bible and knock on doors, but to think of those whom God has allowed you to build up a relationship with and to ask you, what it is that is bringing them close to God through this relationship. We must engage our community for Jesus. This begins by building relationships with others and then as we open our lives up to them, that they see the importance of Jesus to us, in the things we say, in the things we do and the way it is that we live.

Here is the starting point. Not to send the sheep dogs out to bring them in, but to live in such a way that they want to join us. This is what it means to live with the assurance of the future in mind; with an anticipation of the heavenly reward. But we are not selling a future, but a present relationship with Jesus.

This is not going to happen by accident, but through careful thought and planning. Like the manager, we must think about the things that we do, not only to ensure our future, but to build bridges into the community that others can cross.

Think for a moment now. What are the natural ministries that I have through family, friends and social activity or affiliation? Let us ask God to show us how to use these to further the Kingdom. When Jesus says, we cannot serve two masters, he warns us that we cannot have any other priority than his work. Let us then cast aside those things that distract that we may continue the work he has called us to.

AMEN.