

Sermon 2023 01 28 Text

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

=====

From Deuteronomy 18.18

18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.

And from the Gospel of Mark 1.22 and 27

22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority!

=====

We have three Prayer Books authorised for use in this Diocese – The 1662 Book of Common Prayer, An Australian Prayer Book from 1978 and A Prayer Book for Australia from 1992.

Each of these set formats for the celebration of the Eucharist. My first question of the day to you – have you ever seen two priests celebrate the same texts in exactly the same way? And if not, why not?

=====

We have, I think, six translations of the Scriptures authorised for use within worship in this Diocese. And we have a common lectionary which sets the readings for all our services.

And yet not one sermon derived from those consistent readings, added to a humble listening to God, will be the same as any other.

=====

How do we correlate the command and authority of God with the inconsistencies found between each sermon preached today.

Part of it may be accounted for by those who do not bother themselves with listening for the voice of God.

Part of it may be accounted for, because the priest fears the predictable response of Mr or Mrs X in the third row on the left-hand side who they know will not like the words and sit there loudly clearing their throats in disagreement during the whole of the sermon.

Part of it may be the sheer exhaustion of the Priest as they come to the sermon after having consumed their week with some of the tasks required in the life of a Parish in the rest of the week.

Perhaps the Bell Tower is falling down. Perhaps your office is a mess because you do not get to properly complete one task before you start another. Perhaps you have spent an hour holding the hand of a person who is dying and has no family who are close by.

And against the rise and fall of this background there is an expectation that you will clearly hear the word of God and perfectly articulate it to a starving world.

=====

Part of the issue is not just to ensure that the preacher does their homework. Congregations who yearn to get the most they can of the message of God must listen to.

They must listen beforehand by reading the scriptures set for the day. You need to do your part in understanding the authority of a sermon by reading the scriptures set for the day as well.

The words of the readings of the day should not come as a surprise to anyone, because everyone should have read the scriptures were use in our Sunday worship two or three times during the week and reflected on them.

You need to listen for God's voice as well. At times there is a responsibility for a priest to act as a conduit by which the word of God is proclaimed to the world.

Yet part of the capacity of the New Testament message is that when the Christ takes human form every barrier between humanity and God is removed.

We are called to a dual relationship with God; we are called individually and corporately. Our time spent in the early morning desert, as Jesus did, gives us time to listen reflect and grow. Our time together, our gathering invokes the presence of Christ in the midst of us and in the communal breaking of the bread and drinking the wine, the remembrance of the life and sacrifice of God in Christ enhances our unity, but also send out invisible threads which bind us to each other so that there is a corporate interconnection where ever we are, for the fine thread always connects us with God and with the community of faith.

=====

Generally, a sermon is an impermanent thing. Despite the energy poured into its creation, it is a frail thing – a fragile and transient thing.

=====

But some parts of it may never be destroyed. You may recall that I spoke of a time in the past week when I sat with a person who has no family nearby and whose time on this earth is passing. As the person drifted in and out of sleepfulness, they became detached from who I was, and they started quoting tiny remnants of long forgotten sermons back to me – it was humbling that God’s word, imparted imperfectly through me, had found a permanent dwelling place in the mind of this person.

=====

You may recall that in our covid isolation we started something called Sunday Roast.

Some of us assembled online later on Sundays to discuss, dissect, and search the words used in the sermon to lift all our minds out of the timeframe of the 10-15 of worship and dig into the depths of the readings and the responsive sermon.

I found it an incredibly helpful experience. So, for those who may wish to participate in such an activity we will reintroduce that straight after Easter.

=====

God calls us to hear his word in the midst of worship. In that context it builds a platform for our reflection as we hold fast to the reembrace integral to meal of bread and wine.

And through that we rise into a washed and fresh existence that sustains and expands our faith until we are full to overflowing.

=====