

Trinity 13 – Give yourself the time.

'since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe' (Hebrews 12:28).

As I was searching for material for today's sermon, I came across the following anonymous quote. For me it spoke volumes for how I allow the world to get in the way of my spiritual purity. I offer it in the hope that it may help you too.

HOW ENLIGHTENED ARE YOU?

IF....

If you can live without caffeine,

If you can be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,

If you can resist complaining,

If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time,

If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,

If you can ignore a friend's limited education and never correct him or her,

If you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend,

If you can face the world without lies and deceit,

If you can conquer tension without medical help,

If you can relax without liquor,

If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,

If you can honestly say that deep in your heart you have no prejudice against creed, colour, religion, gender preference, or politics,

-- Then you have almost reached the same level of spiritual development as your dog!

Our secular society tells us constantly that all we need to do is feed our physical bodies with enough pleasure, nutrition, exercise and entertainment, all we have to do is please ourselves and we will be fulfilled. And yet we are not. If our secular philosophy of worshipping money and material objects were truly the way we are designed to live, then we would all be flying on cloud 9. And yet as the secular rhetoric has increased and we have begun worshipping things and ourselves more and more over the past thirty years, family breakdowns have become far more common, inequality in our society has increased at an appalling rate, and depression and mental illness has accelerated among the general public to levels never seen before. People work longer and harder on average than thirty years ago, and we no longer share common down time at the same times as our family and friends due to the loosening of working regulations and an increase in expectations designed to serve our secular economy (whatever that is). We don't even have a common rest day or Sabbath. Is it any wonder that our society can feel so very disjointed? All of this stems from an unhealthy focus on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. But it is within our grasp to change things for the better.

We are not merely physical beings. We cannot experience proper fulfilment by only feeding our physical bodies. We also need to feed our souls with spiritual food. If we substitute spiritual food with that designed to only attend to our carnal cravings, then we will surely turn into a very dark image of the things we crave.

But if we attend properly to feeding ourselves, that which nourishes it, body mind and spirit, then we will become something quite beautiful. What does a spiritually nourished person look like, sound like, act like?

Well they look much like you and me, ordinary people.

What do they sound like? Well they sound like you and me too, except the self-defensiveness and self-interest is lessened. They use the same words as you and me, except they use them differently. In conversation their concern seems more for others than themselves and their focus is more on God and on caring for the world than for their own needs. Their language betrays a shockingly outward focussed mentality, almost to the extent of forgetting about their own needs.

What do they act like? Well they act in ways that back up their words. They put others first. They are compassionate and caring. They are careful with their words. They offer their time and money to the service of others. And they make time, no matter how busy their diaries, to ensure that their souls remain fed by praying, reading their bibles, going to church and making time to serve God's people.

You see, prayer frees the mind. Prayer sets us free. It offers us an opportunity to let go of our anxieties, our resentments and our pain. If we can pray with others, then we have further release as we also feel their support. As we speak honestly in their presence about our fears and longings, all our deception and defensive barriers are removed and the real us, the us that God created, shines through.

Service to God and his people sets us free in another way. Service helps us to forget about our own woes. It helps us to realise that others are important too. Service of God offers another element, because it connects our serving to the source of our spiritual and physical health, which is God

himself. So when we serve God we receive an injection of light in the darkest places of our souls, because we are not only serving those we think deserve to be served, or those we feel most attracted to serving, but through our small act, we are serving all people. Serving God, means serving people, but it means serving people for a different purpose than would otherwise be the case. So when we offer our time and money to serve God's Church, we are ensuring that the Church may continue to serve people in a way that is far beyond what we can manage on our own. It ensures that that service is in keeping with God's eternal love and a fitting example of his merciful goodness and grace. It ensures that those who do not know God or have turned their back on him, may experience what life lived in his light promises to bring. It means our joint service can reach places in our world that would be completely impenetrable otherwise.

But all of this starts with a regular commitment, from each of us. Just as Isaiah encourages in our first reading today, first we must set aside that regular time to feed our spiritual selves, through coming together in worship and prayerful living. He warns us against trammelling the Lord's Holy Day or doing our own thing on the Sabbath. He outlines how important it is for us to keep it special. Holding regular days as spiritually special and significant is essential for our spiritual health. This is why the Prophet Isaiah calls us to respect the Sabbath in our own lives and encourage it in our families (Isaiah 58:13-14)

If our concern is for God and all people, then this will not be difficult. Because as the author of the letter to the Hebrews reminded us in our second reading today, our attentiveness to God's call brings with it our entrance into the kingdom that cannot be shaken. If we serve out of love and compassion with God ever before our eyes then we are assured of the heavenly kingdom where our entire beings bask in complete satisfaction, irrelevant of earthly discomfort or hardship (Hebrews 12:18-29).

When, in our Gospel reading, Luke recalls the healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath, the temple authorities completely miss the point of Christ's actions. This is not a story about the Sabbath not being important, but a story about why it is so very important (Luke 13:10-17). The Sabbath is about rest and recovery. It is about spiritual healing. It is about attentiveness to God and building our relationship and trust in him so that we may receive the spiritual food that heals us, makes us whole and thus equips us to go out and serve him and his people in the world.

Amen.