

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18
Psalm 1
1 Thessalonians 2: 1-13
Matthew 22:34-46

26 October 2014 26th Sunday after Pentecost

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The Gospel reading today is a delightfully clever piece of writing and provides us with a picture of Jesus that is not commonly appreciated.

In the reading today we are looking at 'round 2' of Jesus being questioned; and Matthew uses these cameo dialogues to give us some insight into what he saw in all that Jesus reveals. Matthew is sharing the insight and enlightenment that he found, or experienced, in and through the life and person of Jesus.

In the first part of the reading Jesus is asked a question by a Pharisee and by telling us that the one asking the question is a lawyer there is added weight given to the 'testing' nature of the question.

So an important testing question is asked and a clear answer is provided in response, the correct answer is readily provided.

Matthew has established a pattern for us and now goes on with another question, this one being asked by Jesus, and it is asked of the same "knowing" Pharisees; "*What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?*"

And immediately they respond, like Jesus did, with the true and tried, traditional, dogmatic answer; "*The son of David.*"

It is very easy for us to picture ourselves in this same dialogue, and probably most of us would also respond from true and tried, traditional answers.

However, as we read on, the Pharisees answer is called into question; "*43 He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 44 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet''? 45 If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?'*"

And in that probing process of further exploration we find at the end of the reading; "*46 No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*"

This clever piece of writing by Matthew does more than illuminate the shortcomings of the Pharisees; it calls into question the inherited tradition and it identifies the simplistic and surface value of the orthodox doctrines and dogmas; it serves to demonstrate how inadequate the true and tried answers to real questions of faith are.

Ask any Christian “who is Jesus’ and my guess is that over 80% would immediately respond with “he’s the Son of God”. That degree of ‘enlightenment’, as has been illustrated in Matthew’s gospel, is worthless, inadequate, and fails to appreciate the revelation that Matthew witnessed.

The early church in continuing a tradition from its inherited roots has also inherited its own Pharisaic’ model of theological non-enlightenment.

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‘Who is Jesus’ is not a question that seeks a doctrinal response, nor is it an opening for some slushy emotional invisible friend phenomena; rather, like today’s ‘who is the Messiah’, the question invites us to discover who we really are.

And that invitation to discover leads us to an even more ancient enlightenment: “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*”

In Leviticus, through the person or character of Moses, we are provided with a prophetic enlightenment. We don’t have to be concerned here with the delivery method, but perhaps pause to be surprised and disturbed by the insight; “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*”

Primarily because of our inherited pharisaic tradition this ancient insight still evades our comprehension. And that itself is quite amazing for earlier in the book of Genesis we are described as ‘imago dei’, of the image of God. Our dreamtime story of creation in the book of Genesis already held the insight later received through the prophetic tradition of Moses.

Somehow in maintaining the traditions of the ‘Scribes and the Pharisees’ we subverted this foundational faith reality and ascribed ‘holiness’ to one always out of our reach.

Matthew’s dialogue however suggests that the early followers of Jesus received again, and bore witness to this ancient enlightenment. And in today’s gospel it is presented not as prophetic insight, but as revealed insight. The “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy*” that Christ revealed, and that is captured in again by John in the reality that “the Word became flesh’, was glimpsed by those early non-traditionalists that listened to and lived with Jesus.

The authorised version of theology from the early church was unable or unwilling to engage this revelation, and so Matthew composes his clever dialogue and leaves it as an unanswered, and even an unasked question: “*46 No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*”

So today, we are again given an opportunity to follow the well-trodden path of the Pharisees, providing only doctrinal answers, or no answers, and also asking no further questions; or we can take another path and seek to discover the Messiah, the Son of God, the image of God, the Word made flesh and seek to encounter ourselves in the prophetic tradition, to know for ourselves that “*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy*”

Who we are, each and all, is echoed in the mantra “We are the Body of Christ”, however is that a Pharisaic uttering, or a reality that we actually know? Matthew leaves us to ask the question for ourselves, and so to discover our calling, a calling that embodies the Word made flesh.

In our discovery our world changes, for then like Paul we are drawn and driven to lead a life “*lead a life worthy of God*”, a life lived in the image of God..

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. -- Albert Einstein