

## 30 August 2015 Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Song of Solomon 2: 8 - 13

Psalm 45

James 1: 17-27

Mark 7:1-8,14-23

[Textweek Proper 17B/Ordinary 22B/Pentecost 14 August 30, 2015](#) Textweek

Save today's service sheet for it has so much to offer and so much for us to reflect on.

Today's readings speak to us as a two-faced people, and they address the two faces of our being; the Pharisee and the Beloved.

As we read, and re-read them we can become aware of these two aspects of ourselves, become aware of our inner natures and so can also seek to find our wholeness, the face we had before we were born.

The dialogue in the gospel and the question that the Pharisees ask of Jesus is a dialogue of our unbelief; it is our inner voice that wants things to stay the same in "*the tradition of our elders*".

It is also the voice, the inner voice of our self-righteousness that is critical of both newness and difference; "*Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?*"

And it is the voice of fear, the fear of change and the fear of undertaking a new, maybe radical, life direction, a fear of giving up that which we so dearly hold on to.

The confronting response of Jesus is a challenge we all need to hear;

*"Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'".*

It is designed to bring us up short, even elicit a defensive response, and so after a pause it is again underlined; "*You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.*"

Ironically, the most pervasive group that holds on dearly to its tradition is the Church!

We will of course all have well-rehearsed excuses for explaining our Pharisaic nature and we can all readily identify evil or ungodly activity all around us; but once again we are brought back to the part we play and to the person we are; *"For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come"*.

Now let's go to the first reading and discover the other side of our nature. The Song of Solomon is a love song, pure and simple; some have interpreted it within the context of a love song between God and Israel, and others a song of love between Christ and the church; however in reality it is a love song, nothing less.

Its true delight is finding ourselves within it as 'beloved'; in the song between lover and loved we seek to apprehend ourselves as the song itself. God and us are not two voices, rather we are a song of love, for we are both lover and loved and so we are one.

I remember walking through the streets of Kathmandu one night with a small boy who we had rescued from the slums and from an abusive father; he didn't know where we were going, and didn't know me particularly well; but he took hold of my hand in perfect trust. He took hold of the hand of God, and so did I; both of us found ourselves 'beloved', a reality of the Song of Solomon, the song of love that is creative of life.

The movement from Pharisee to beloved is the movement into wholeness; as Pharisees we might know the words of the song, and may even know some of the traditional tunes; but as 'beloved' we are the song.

When we sing from our wholeness, we can more fully appreciate what James seeks to illustrate in the second reading: *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above"*.

James addresses our wholeness for he speaks not to the Pharisee; rather he speaks to the one in the Song: *"You must understand this, my beloved"*; and it is the one in the Song that knows of the perfect gift: *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above"*.

James goes on to give an illustration of life lived as "the first fruits", life lived as the 'beloved' in the Song of Solomon; and it follows a fourfold path;

1. Be open; *"let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger"*.
2. Empty oneself; *"rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness"*.
3. Embrace life; *"welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls"*.
4. Be, beloved; *"be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves"*.

Our realisation as 'beloved' is made manifest in our being *"doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves"*.

And just as we were brought up short by Jesus' response to the Pharisees in the gospel, so too the final words of James in the second reading confront us with the reality of our religion;

*"If any think they are religious.... but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

The reading from James is framed by the activity of 'giving'; and that is the activity of being beloved, for love is the activity of giving oneself, it is the activity of God described in Genesis, the giving of Godself into creation, and

it is the activity revealed in Christ, the giving of life that opened the tomb to resurrection.

James speaks of a worldview that is seen from our 'beloved' selves; *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*

And that worldview is made manifest in a religion *"that is pure and undefiled"*.

The fruit of that reality *"is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

The letter of James is very practical and encourages us into a practical outworking of our belief: *"be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves"*; and that in turn echoes the enlightenment of Christ as narrated in the gospels; *"You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit."* [Matthew 7:16]

So let's take the practical direction of James and ponder it for ourselves; *"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

When I realised that for the cost of a cup of coffee per day, I could educate a child in Nepal, and for the cost of a cup of coffee per day I could feed and house a child in Nepal; I wondered why there are any children in the world, without homes, without food and children who have no chance of an education.

To become 'beloved' we only have to share, and in our sharing we realise that *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above"*

In the world we drink 2.25 billion cups of coffee per day, that's 93,750,000 per hour.

In the week ahead, in every day, each time you drink a cup of coffee, be mindful of the direction offered by James; *"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

Slowly churches around the world are becoming empty; to fill them all that is required is for us to reflect a *"Religion that is pure and undefiled"*; and to do that we need to *"be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves"*.