

Focus Reading: Matt 11:15 - 30

Holy God open our ears to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today and always. Amen.

Today, extend special greetings to St Mary's Anglican Parish, South Road, in Adelaide as they celebrate their 179<sup>th</sup> anniversary. St Mary's is the third oldest church in the Diocese of Adelaide. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841 St Mary's on the Sturt opened its doors for public worship. Sadly, because of COVID-19, this year the doors are still closed, however the community of faith is looking forward with great expectation to reopening those doors later in July. I give thanks to God for 179 years of ministry and mission in and through this church and its faithful community, and look forward to the 180<sup>th</sup> celebrations in 2021.

The focus reading for today is from Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 11, verses 15 to 30.

Often when I read scripture, I have a sense of déjà vu, that sense of having already experienced the situation I am reading about. Today's Gospel is one of those passages.

It begins with an indictment from Jesus to a wayward generation '*Let anyone with ears listen!*'

You can hear his frustration as he spoke of his experience of the people around him...

*<sup>16</sup> "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

*<sup>17</sup> 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'*

The people were oblivious to everything around them.

Then Jesus goes on to describe the way in which he and the company he keeps have been perceived by these people. John the Baptist has been described as having a demon. The people have described Jesus as a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. In their blindness to the bigger picture and to the truth they cast aspersions on the Son of Man.

Labelled and stereotyped in the worst possible way, frustrated that all he had tried to share and teach had gone over their heads, Jesus adds what could be considered an aside. He reminds those who are listening that '*wisdom is vindicated by her deeds*'. They may be beyond wisdom at this time; however, revelation will happen and then the people will realise what it is they have missed.

Such is his frustration, Jesus begins to reproach the cities of Galilee who, if their ears were able to hear, would have recognised his deeds for what they were; an opportunity to show the power of repentance and healing. In rejecting his word and his Way he was telling them of the judgement that awaited them.

A passage like this shows us how little we know of Jesus. He speaks of amazing deeds undertaken in these cities. However, when we search the scriptures there is no record of these deeds in the Gospels, only Jesus' response to their inattention. This serves as a reminder that the gospels only record a portion of his ministry. The things we do not know about Jesus could very well far outnumber the things we do know.

When I read a passage like this, one that often challenges my image of Jesus as incredibly patient, I am encouraged to dig a little deeper to try and find out what Jesus might actually be saying.

Today I hear the word 'woe' and I think back to my childhood and phrases such as 'woe betide', usually in connection with me doing something I shouldn't, and the resulting punishment. Is this what Jesus was saying here? It certainly appears that way.

When I explored a little further, I discovered that the Greek word for woe in this context can be translated "alas", expressing great pity. Rather than a statement of anger, is Jesus voicing great sorrow and sadness? Could Jesus' condemnation of these cities be described as the sadness of a broken heart?

Jesus had spent time with these people and offered them the most precious thing in the world and it had been rejected. What was it that broke his heart, that evoked such deep sadness in Jesus? There is no doubt it was serious. Jesus compared the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum to Sodom and Gomorrah, places known and destroyed because their sin.

What had Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum done that was so serious?

These cities of Galilee had had the privilege of seeing and hearing Jesus and encountering his message. In their indifference they ignored the invitation extended to them, they disregarded his message and they did nothing. Maybe the emphasis on that opening verse was one of great frustration and sadness <sup>5</sup> *Let **anyone** with ears listen!*

How often have we found ourselves in the same place as the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum? How often have we been guilty of ignoring the invitation extended to us through Christ? How often have we been indifferent, not recognising the message, let alone realising that it comes with a responsibility? How often, even when hearing the message, have we done nothing?

Jesus said

<sup>16</sup> *"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

<sup>17</sup> *'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'*

As one commentator wrote *'The greater our privileges have been, the greater is our condemnation if we fail to shoulder the responsibilities and accept the obligations which these privileges bring with them.....*

*.... These cities did not attack Jesus Christ; they did not drive him from their gates; they did not seek to crucify him; they simply disregarded him. Neglect can kill as much as persecution can. '*

In this passage Jesus is offering the people of the cities of Galilee a last chance to embrace his teaching and all that it offered. They had heard the Good News, they had witnessed Jesus ministry, yet they continued to *act like children sitting in a marketplace calling to one another*. Oblivious to everything else around them.

And that was the *deja vu* moment I experienced when I read this passage once again. Today's generations, in so many ways, are no different to the generation Jesus was addressing, in frustration, despair and great sadness.

What are the excuses people use today to avoid the invitation of the Gospels, and how – and this is the real challenge – how can we continue to live and teach God's way to a world that effectively is indifferent to the message?

At our baptism and affirmed at Confirmation we each make a commitment to *'strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with our whole heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, until our life's end.'*

To be a disciple is an active response to those promises and it demands of us the privilege and responsibility of telling the Good News of Christ. We do this as individuals and as a community of faith (or we should!)

As a diocese we have accepted the challenge to grow and flourish: in faith, service, generosity, and growing disciples. I know 2020 has been a challenging year, and it's not over yet, but the diocesan vision hasn't dimmed. Vision 2022 still offers us a pathway to be all that Jesus has called us to be, and that includes enabling *'anyone with ears'* to listen.

And in this Covid transition period we live in a Season of Opportunity where we can reclaim the best of our faith and tradition.

I encourage you to check out the diocesan website and embrace the challenge personally and in your community of faith, especially as we begin to gather once again in person and reconnect with the world around us.

*May we be united and connected, confident and competent disciples of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

May we not be complacent or indifferent. May we have ears to listen. Amen.