

14th Sunday after Trinity, September 2nd, 2018.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 20-23.

Also James 1:12-end.

- <sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Jesus deals with a sensitive issue. Jesus was speaking at a time among a people who remembered the Maccabean martyrs who died than be defiled by eating unclean food. There was the example of Daniel and his friends - of a young age - who determine to eat vegetables than be defiled by the food from the kings table - and God honoured their trust in him. He spoke to Jews who held tightly and strongly to the Lord and the Law, in a era of occupation by a foreign power which worshipped many other gods. He speaks about food privately to his disciples than be misunderstood by the crowds.

And then he moves the focus - that the focus of religion is not upon the eternal, it is upon the internal, Jesus moves his followers from the outside to the inside. He takes them and us to the heart - in the Jewish mindset the heart was the place of emotions, motivation and thought. He takes us to what is going on inside us.



conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15).

An idea that takes root. It is like an airplane seeking to land. Do we allow it permission? Anglican Bishop JC Ryle said "thoughts are the parents of words and deeds." What are you thinking upon? Of course, this is connected to - what do you read, listen to, watch...

There are a range of sins mentioned here. Jesus mentioned sexual sins - sexual immorality, adultery, lewdness translated also as lustful desires for anything or anyone. 'Sexual immorality - the word porneiai - covers a wide range - which includes pornography, and wrong attitudes towards sex' (David Adam, p239). These sins can affect someone single, in a committed relationship or in a marriage, regardless of age or gender.

The word for theft - is kleptes - Judas was a thief as he stole from the disciples money box. Paul warns against theft in the church in his letters. But are there other ways that a person can steal from another? If we withhold from someone or an organisation what they are due? Theft? Is withholding praise from someone - theft - of what they are entitled to?

In mentioning murder, as well as theft, envy, adultery Jesus is of course reaffirming the ongoing place of the 10 commandments in the life of a Christian disciple. But note also how Jesus himself broadened murder - in the Sermon on the Mount - Jesus said -

"I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgement."

What goes on inside matters. Jesus equates hate with murder. In reflecting upon this, it is useful to include the word Jesus mentions - malice. The word used here is ponerous - it stands for someone being actively evil. The person who is ponerous is 'the one in whose heart there is desire to harm.' Another definition includes "delight in mischiefs and tragedies."

I remember a very honest story. A pastor. International teacher. Said he and another pastor had gone become very divided over some issues. The relationship had broken down. But if you asked him, he said - he had forgiven him. Yet this pastor remembers one day, in a pastors meeting, hearing the news that this person, had had a car accident, car totally destroyed. He said, he felt in his heart it rise up, almost a feeling of delight at this tragedy. Horrible. Right. But he thought he was fine. Yet there was still hate. Malice. He had not forgiven. And it manifested itself in malice. Paul teaches - 'don't let the sun go down on your anger and give the enemy a foothold.' The greek word is TOPOS - from which we get 'topo'. A space. We may not even be aware of what is there until it shows itself...

More briefly, these next ones we recognise easily...

Greed - the desire to have more, a heart that sees happiness in things instead of in God.

Deceit - comes from a Greek word, which means bait - like the food used in a mousetrap, a word meaning 'trickery'.

Envy - this is not being jealous. The word can be translated - 'the evil eye' - an attitude that we look at the happiness or success of others and if we could stop it, we would...

Slander. The word is blasphemia - words against man words against God. Insulting other people or God. Racism, bigotry come into this.

Pride. When translated the word means "showing oneself above." Describes an attitude towards other people that says you are better than others. When the Greeks used this word, it suggested an attitude that may never become public - it can be deep inside we compare ourselves to others, and others are lacking. We may pretend to be humble, but in our hearts, we are proud.

Finally folly. This is about morals. People who lack moral judgment.

These sins are only some of what can defile us. And yet as we read this list, we can all identify with one, more of these words. To say that we cannot fall into them is not wise. And note how these sins affects the relationships around us. We hurt others through our defilement. These sins can bring damage within our lives, so that even if confessed, further counselling or healing prayer may be needed.

Jesus by naming these sins, points to what he desires a heart that is pure - transformation of our lives, and through our lives being transformed, other lives - in our families, in our work places, etc are transformed as well because we all influence others affect others.

Remember our gospel. He is preaching the good news of the reign and rule of God - the kingdom. **He is** good news, as Mark begins in chapter 1. When a man who is paralysed is brought to him, Jesus says - your sins are forgiven. The deep need of a man to be forgiven. Later when Levi - known also as Matthew - is called to follow him, he throws a party. There are many, what society were calling "sinners" - this term was applied by the Pharisees who refused to follow the Law of Moses. And the question is asked - why does he eat with such people. Jesus replies:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Who are the sick? Who has a heart problem? And then in Mark 10:45 -

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."



Ransom was something paid to set someone free from slavery. And on the Cross, as Jesus dies, we hear how the temple curtain is ripped from top to bottom, the curtain which stood in front of the Holy of Holies, which was where God was said to dwell in the Temple - through Jesus death all can draw near. Sins are forgiven. As Christians we are forgiven people - through the blood of Christ. Jesus shows that people may be defiled, but through the cross they can be clean.

And where, as Christians, we have committed these sins or others, John reminds us -

"if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One - he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins..." (1 John 2:1-2).

You have not blown it. You can return and ask for forgiveness and you will be cleansed from all unrighteousness... and a new start is offered.

Yet while we are holy in God's eyes, our hearts are not pure and so we continually need to return to God to ask his forgiveness. We are a work in progress. We seek God to do a deeper work within us. We are encouraged in Romans 6 -

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires...."

And in Romans 8 -

"by the Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of the body."

It does not rely upon our strength alone. But as James reminds us. We have choices to make.

"Get rid of the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you. ... Do merely listen to the word... Do what it says. "

For others of us, we have choices to be made. We see the sins - these or others - the question. What do we choose? For some the choice is a clear one. But for others a sin has a hold on us - it has become a habit - it can be sexual

immorality, but there are others which can be equally powerful. For us we need further help.

We need the help of Christian community. A deep community is what we aim for as a Church and part of that is allowing people to share messy lives knowing they will be loved and supported as they try to sort it out. A place where people can admit where they are struggling with sin. A church leader once said, that 90% of the power of sin is broken by admitting our sin to another person - we are held in guilt and shame. In fact at times, as we admit our sin, we realise at times we hold false guilt attached to our real guilt. Home groups should be a place where such openness can exist - safe spaces where what is said in the group stays in the group.

Prayer ministry is another place - to bring a need or issue a struggle and ask for the Lord's help. Do not suffer in silence. Share with someone you trust. Let there be someone to pray for you, to be someone you can say - 'I've fallen again' - or who rejoice with you as you resist temptation. And for you, with whom you are entrusted, be that friend, be that example like Jesus shows. walk alongside them, intercede for them...It can be a tough walk, when no one else knows. But it is a walk like Christ's who took on our sins... Walk as Christ did along the ones who struggled with sin.

We worship and adore a loving and holy God. Who sent his Son to die for our sins, but who is working to sanctify us, to make us holy, by his Spirit. It is possible that some of these thoughts lead us to prayer - now, or with others, or perhaps

with our prayer team afterwards. But I am going to use a prayer on the screen. Maybe you find it helpful. You may want to silently pray it, as I pray it aloud...

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.