

Reflection for Wednesday June 3

Collect for Pentecost

Almighty God,
at the feast of Pentecost
you sent your Holy Spirit to the disciples,
filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel:
empower us with that same Spirit
to witness to your redeeming love and draw all people to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for a Martyr

Almighty God,
who gave to your servant Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda,
boldness to confess the name of Jesus Christ
and courage to die for this faith:
teach us always to be ready
to give a reason for the hope that is in us,
and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord and Saviour;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 12:18-27

¹⁸ Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, ¹⁹ 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁰ There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; ²¹ and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; ²² none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. ²³ In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her.'

²⁴ Jesus said to them, 'Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵ For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? ²⁷ He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.'

Reflection;

Today we read about Jesus in the thick of conflict. Just prior to the account of the Sadducees trying to trick him with a theological question, is the story of the Pharisees and Herodians trying to trick him with a political question; is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. These two incidents seem to have been sparked by Jesus telling the parable of the wicked tenants in the vineyard. In that story, a man builds a beautiful vineyard and gives it to some tenants but they refuse to acknowledge him, or his representatives, and refuse to give him his share. The Gospel tells us that when they realised that Jesus was telling this story against them, they wanted to arrest him but because they feared the crowd, they left him. Instead they try to trick him into condemning himself.

These stories tell us quite a lot about what our relationship with God is supposed to be like and where our focus should be.

In the parable of the vineyard, it is the entitled ones who refuse to recognise the owner of the vineyard. They have no respect for him or those he sends. They are completely caught up in their own importance and have come to believe that all that they enjoy belongs to them alone.

The real life question about paying taxes is an attempt to trick Jesus which he elegantly sidesteps by telling them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. In doing so he offers an invitation to reassess what we give and to whom. We live in a world where certain things are required of us, for example, taxes. But everything we have comes from God and we must give to God what God requires of us, the love of our hearts, minds, bodies and souls.

The question that we have heard today, about the implications of the resurrection, shows again that those who are trying to trick Jesus have their attention on the wrong things. In that culture widows were very vulnerable. There was no social security so if a man died leaving his wife with no children, it was the responsibility of his brother to marry her and to provide her with children, preferably sons, who would care for her in her old age.

Jesus' antagonists take a duty of care and use it to construct a story that is designed to make the idea of the resurrection seem absurd. If a woman marries a man, and then his brother, and then his brother, etc. But they are missing the point. They are throwing a complicated, hypothetical argument at him but Jesus' response is simple. He says that they know neither the scriptures nor God. The resurrected life is not focussed on the same concerns as this current life. God is the God of the living, not of the dead. We are to focus our living on

serving God not on all the trivial things that humans are so good at giving undue importance to and then arguing about.

These stories are just as relevant for our communities today as they were in Jesus' day. So often our churches seem to get caught up in complex conflict and put huge amounts of energy and focus on things that are not important to the growing of God's kingdom.

Like the tenants in the vineyard, we are given good things but we focus on preserving them for ourselves, keeping things the way we like them, rather than on growing fruit to offer back to God.

Like those who asked whether or not it is lawful to pay taxes, we can become caught up in arguments about how to use our earthly resources, forgetting that all that we have comes from God and that anything we do must be motivated by how best to use those resources to set the captives free, feed the poor, clothe the hungry, heal the sick.

Like the Sadducees questioning Jesus about the resurrection, we can become so concerned with the things of this world that we fail to see that God is God not of the dead but of the living and that we are called to share that life with the world.

Immediately after Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees, he is asked, which is the most important commandment. ²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."³¹ The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

As a church we have a responsibility to be good stewards of all that we have been given. We do need to follow earthly rules and be good members of our community. But whatever we do, in order to bear fruit, all our choices and actions must always be based in the love of God and of our neighbour.

The Lord be with you.