

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 23rd October, 2022
Ecclesiasticus 35: 12 - 17
Psalm 84: 1 - 7
Luke 18: 9 - 14
'Be Honest with God'

Good morning. Welcome to our service today, those who are here in St Marc's, and those joining us on Zoom. It is good to have you with us, and it is great to be back.

Let's Pray

First, then, let's hear from you! What jumped out of today's readings for you? What challenged you? What made you stop and think? What puzzled you?

It is important to remind you that there are no wrong answers in this section - and no wrong questions either. I genuinely want to hear your thoughts on today's readings; and that should help me to address those things you're finding a challenge.

The revised title I chose for today was an invocation: 'Be honest with God', it could also have been 'We can't fool God'. (Original: Give to the most High)

Our Gospel reading, from Luke 18, this morning tells us that Jesus was telling this parable to 'those who trusted in their own righteous standing and despised others' He was addressing legalistic Jewish people, or Pharisees; but just the same applies to all of us 2000+ years later.

God knows us intimately, he knows what's in our minds and our hearts - even better than we do ourselves. So it's rather pointless .trying to pretend we are 'Holier than anyone else' because God sees through our facade - even if we fool some humans. (Psalm 139:2 - 4 'You discern my thoughts from far away ... and are acquainted with all my ways ... Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.)

Jesus knows our thoughts, and He knows our sins - we may be able to hide our misdeeds from other humans, but there is absolutely no fooling God. That realisation can actually be quite scary.

But the really good news is that we're told (1 John 1: 9) 'If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' That's a wonderful promise; we all need it; because, as humans, we are all naturally sinful and desperately need to be forgiven, cleansed and healed.

And, talking about worship, as Anglicans, or Baptists, or Methodists or Pentecostals or Roman Catholics, or even members of St Marc's Church, Grenoble there's a serious danger that we can come to believe that we alone have the correct way of serving and worshipping Jesus and confessing our sins; or that our way is the only way. And, I'm afraid to say, clergy can be among the worst offenders.

Personally, I think it's far more likely that all of us have it wrong!

I'm sure you know that, whenever you point your index finger at someone else (or their shortcomings) you still have three fingers pointing back at yourself.

I was very fortunate to spend three years at an International, Interdenominational theological College with fellow students from just about all around the world; and we all took it in turns to lead worship. That was a special blessing, because I heard, saw and learned a whole variety of different styles of worship and I learned that some of them were really far more exciting than our own!

It is good to worship God among other people, - the music often sounds better for one thing. But confession is something we can do on our own, quietly, one to one with God; and I promise you (from personal experience) that His forgiveness will be even more loving, and even more cleansing and even more healing.

Having cleansed and healed you, He will then empower you and call you to do His work - just as He did with the Apostle Paul and, I must say, just as He did with me!

So before we close, let's have a brief look at the reading from Ecclesiasticus, which some people have had trouble finding. It's from a part of the Bible often referred to as 'The Apocrypha', which was not in normal use in the Church of England until 20 years, or more, ago.

The book now referred to as Ecclesiasticus, was also often formerly known as the book of Sirach. (The Canonical Books were agreed by Council of Hippo 393, and confirmed by the Council of Carthage 397. But, much more recently we had verification of different texts vis the Qmran Scrolls and modern methods of linguistic verification etc.)

The passage we heard today, talks about making sacrificial offerings to God vv. 4&9, and dedicating tithes to God; and it says v.10 'be generous when you worship the Lord, and do not stint the first fruits of your hands.'

I really want to highlight about this reading, that our offerings do not only have to be money. Yes, of course God's church needs money to pay the bills; but we realise that not everyone here has much money; but we also need plenty of physical help, with things like set-up and clearing up before and after services, help with Sunday school, help with music, help with PowerPoint - even help preparing drinks.

Your gifts of time, and physical help, are every bit as important and precious to God. If you don't have much money to give, you can also give other things like your time and energy; and I know some of you already do that, but many don't - yet.

But it all comes back to being honest with God and in the way you worship Him.

For example, there is something wrong if you are spending more money on beer and wine and parties than you give to God.

There is also something wrong if you can stay up until all hours going to a party on a Saturday night; but you are not able to get up to worship our heavenly Father God on Sunday morning. Our worship and service for God must come first, before everything else in our lives.

Jesus is not a party pooper - we often read in the Gospels about Him attending parties or suppers. But He definitely expects us to put Him first in their lives; we often read about Him being in the place of worship - taking part in worship on the Sabbath.

I just need to say something about the children. I can assure you that your children will imitate you - if you are happy to be late for church, so will they; you need to set the example.

They also need to be in Sunday School - ON TIME!

So, as I close, let's listen again to some words from Ecclesiasticus:

To keep from wickedness is pleasing to the Lord, and to forsake unrighteousness is an atonement.

Be generous when you worship the Lord, and do not stint the first fruits of your hands

Give to the most high as He has given to you and as generously as you can afford.

In other words: 'Be honest with God!'

Let's PRAY