

## Sermon - Psalm 1 - Peacemakers Planting in Peace

We are all shaped by others ..... and .....in turn, by our attitudes and actions we shape others. In some sad situations this shaping has happened at a time in our lives, or with such destructive force, that we could not but be hurt or scared for years..... even to the present. .... or so scared and hurt others!

This destructive shaping is really a misshaping or a marring of our humanity. An abuse of persons and a denial of the God - for we believe that every human life is made in the Image of God. ....

This misshaping is never right and should always be resisted. If it is 'Systems' creating human misery then they need breaking/renewing.

The church as institution, and us as individuals - have need to truthfully acknowledge old failings, repent of current failures of character and practice, and to guard against future abuses - actions and attitudes that cause division between people and rob us of peace.

[The Book of James has indicated several such situations -

1. Favouring the rich over the poor at Christian meetings - James 2:1-7
2. Offering hollow words of comfort which only discourage - James 2:15-16
3. The destructive use of our words - James 3:1-12
4. & In Chapter 4 - Jealousy and selfish ambition - causing disorder and 'every vile practice' - James 3:13-16]

*Discussion - Name institutions or historical events where this reality has been blatantly apparent to you.*

But alongside this - we should also celebrate where the Church has resisted tyranny and abusive behaviour. We must celebrate where the church has, and Christian Individuals have, denied self-interest, and self-preservation, so to be faithful in following the call of our Lord - to love neighbour as ourselves. We are thankful that in such situations the Church and Christian individuals have been instrumental in enabling others to be uplifted, and expanded and made whole - at peace.

*Discussion - Where you have seen or felt his uplifting reality.*

I am sorry if the first few minutes of this talk have distressed you?

My hope has been to move us to a point of motivation ....., to ask, how can we be positive agents of uplifting influence? Peacemakers, if you like.

This is where James has wanted to push us ...James 3:17-18 .... this has also been a common theme in the three Bible readings of today.

Psalm 1 - is more than just the first of many Psalms - it has been carefully selected to head the collection. It sets the tone by:

1. Identifying the Word of God (The Law of the Lord) as the source of blessing. It is the reservoir to sustain and bring vitality to our lives. Christian - whatever you meditate on. Whatever you read. Whatever you listen to - be sure to include - to preference - the Law of the Lord.
2. Warning that bad company, and by implication, bad examples, will ultimately bring ruin.

Now these two truths are repeated throughout the Book of the Psalms but we must also note a couple of things:

1. The ruin of the wicked may not be effected in this life! The psalm says that the wicked will not stand at the judgement. I take this to be in that final reckoning before God. - when the way of the wicked will perish. We need to face this future ruin with some caveats or qualifications:
  - i. We must warn the wicked or stand against the wicked -we cannot just let wicked ways be unchallenged.
  - ii. But - We can leave the final reckoning to God - remember the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds ..... resist evil but never with violence! always with a certain grace! .....For our knowledge of others and their motivation is partial - ultimately let God do the 'weeding'.

2. It seems that it can be very tempting to follow bad examples.

Hence:

- i. Negatively - Make sure you are not the bad example! There are several warning against causing a little one to stumble - St. Paul said he would rather lay aside all his freedoms - if it was those freedoms which undermined the faith of another.
- ii. Positively - hold before you the Word of God - or more importantly the one who perfectly encapsulated that Law - Jesus our Lord - Instructive - Jesus in Mark 9 - If we were so shaped by Jesus then we could/should avoid being the worst or consistently bad example!
  - a. Servanthood
  - b. Humility - count others as better than yourself. We must understand this in an authoritative/paternalistic world. In such a world the person of status find it very difficult to serve the lowly. The solution - 'trick your mind' - tell yourself that they are of a higher status - St. Paul - count others as better than yourself .... Phil. 2 - then you are free to serve them!

Returning to St. James 4:7-8

The primacy to draw near to God was beautifully illustrated to me by an Orthodox priest - Fr. Abdullah - It was at the start of 2017 - at the end of a two week visit to Syria - as I was visiting the ancient Christian village of Maaloula - I had just heard the Lord's prayer recited in Aramaic - the language of Jesus. We now found ourselves in the Convent of St. Thecla. .... We were met at the Convent of Saint Thecla by Fr. Abdullah. His face to me bore a striking resemblance to the 'Christ Pantocrator' mosaic from Daphni. Here was one who knew pain - had approached closer to that 'black unvisitable place'.

He led us up to the Shrine of Saint Thecla where the Iconostasis was but an empty wall. No more the beautiful images which were to inspire our

thoughts heavenward! In that shrine, Fr. Abdullah spoke no words but he had propped up, against the Iconostasis, a prayer in a picture frame.

This prayer has become for me the Prayer of St. Thecla.

The prayer becomes the Iconostasis. It motivates me heavenward to selflessness and generosity towards others. It keeps me striving in that heavenward direction.

The 'prayer wall' reminds me that the story we allow our minds to inhabit is that which shapes our actions. And so, as important as our actions be, they are not the most important thing in life!

It is how we maintain/become Peacemakers and indeed - continue to be peacemakers Planting in peace.

I leave you with this poem.

The prayer of St. Thecla



O Christ, Our God,  
we all are pledged to serve  
Thee with our whole being.  
Help us to continue to work  
for Thee through our  
church without seeking  
praise.... without seeking  
personal gain ..... without  
judging others ..... without a  
feeling that we have work-  
ed hard enough and now  
must allow ourselves rest.  
Give us strength to do what  
is right and help us to go  
on striving and to remem-  
ber that activities are not  
the main thing in life.  
The most important thing  
is to have our hearts direc-  
ted and attuned to Thee.  
Amen

The prayer of St. Thecla was  
stood at the bottom right of the  
empty Iconostasis 'wall'