

Sermon

Trusting God, rather than our own thoughts and feelings.

(Matthew 21, v28-32)

I have chosen the parable of the Two Sons for two principle reasons; firstly, its mercifully short so, this being my first sermon, I can only go so far wrong; secondly and perhaps more importantly it is a parable that reflected my own thought process when I was asked to be warden, I am ashamed to admit that **like the first son**, my initial reaction was to say no.

I hope you will agree it is a perfectly human reaction when asked to take on any new responsibility or challenge. But there is no escaping them is there - we face responsibilities and challenges throughout our lives;

On a personal level, responsibilities to our loved ones, ourselves and our career. We face enormous challenges as a church: nationally our numbers continue to fall; the pandemic has seen a huge reduction in volunteers, practically limiting the church's work; and here at Holy Trinity we have the not inconsiderable task of TT, the responsibility to get it as right as possible for ourselves and future generations, no mean feat. And without wishing to be too dramatic, we face challenges on a global scale: Climate change; rebuilding after the pandemic, and in recent months of course, war in Europe.

Whatever the issue, it is easy to feel apprehensive, inadequate or even overwhelmed; and speculating about the characters in our parable, I wonder, might this be how the first son felt? That he simply wasn't good enough? We are not told who, what or why, only that something made him change his mind and allowed him to overcome his initial reticence.

So how do we do this?

There was an example of a potential way forward in a recent safeguarding course that I attended; it was before Christmas so it took place online and prior to the event couple of case studies were distributed; we spent the first half hour or so discussing them and they were, as you can imagine pretty harrowing and upsetting cases of abuse; and following the initial discussion, one woman, who had just been appointed safeguarding officer, put her virtual hand up and admitted that she felt pretty hopeless and really was not sure she was the right person for the job. Leader of the course responded in a way that really struck a chord. She said 'The fact you feel like that, shows me that you actually comprehend the scale and complexity of the challenge, and are therefore precisely the right person to take it on'.

it was reframing apprehension as wisdom and thus encouragement.

And I wonder if we can we apply this more broadly whenever we are feeling unsure. Encouragement we need is clearly articulated in **(2 Corinthians 12, v9)** 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' This tells us it is okay to be apprehensive. But rather than letting apprehension or any other perfectly human reaction dictate, we need to consider God's will, and do all we possibly can, with faith in His strength. In other words, take a step back from ourselves before taking a step forward with God.

Those steps can take time however so I think what this requires as much as anything is patience. I am always struck by how often the word 'wait' appears in scripture, 'wait

patiently for the Lord' – now this is an acute case of someone not practicing what they preach, as I want everything to be, exactly as I think it should be, and I want it yesterday! Waiting can be testing, but it is another example of where we need to quieten our own thoughts and emotions, and believe and trust that God, in the words of that wonderful hymn, is working His purpose out, however long it takes and often without tangible signs of progress.

There is a relevant episode in **Acts 5**. Peter and the Apostles are on trial before the Sanhedrin who are determined to halt their ministry, they are plotting and scheming and racking their brains trying to come up with a way of condemning them, when a highly respected elder, Gamaliel, stands up, sends the Apostles out of the courtroom, and says to his fellow councilors, 'Release them, for if their ministry is the work of man, it will come to nothing...but if it is God's will, there is nothing we can do to stop it.'

Personally I find something reassuring in the fact that the Apostles were not aware of this being said - similarly, we must trust that God is at work, in us and around us. He will, and probably already has, equipped us to face the difficulties that lie ahead, even we feel unprepared – This, in turn, means we can genuinely have hope, safe in the knowledge that we won't face any difficulty alone.

Returning to our parable, I wonder if there is also a potential warning in the actions of the second son; a caution perhaps against well-meaning but flawed overconfidence. Carol and I were lucky enough to hear Bishop Steven speak recently. He alluded in his talk to things not always working out and was asked for a particular example. He explained how at the end of the summer last year, he became almost obsessively determined that everything, that had been so disrupted by the pandemic, would be completely back to normal by Christmas and as a result, he admitted he took far too much on, became terribly run down and caught covid. So confidence, at other end of the scale to apprehension, also needs to be considered and reconsidered; we must accept that our own ambitions may not match God's.

Whether our reaction to a task is one of strength or weakness we can all take heed of **Proverbs 3, 5-6** 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.'

Now I am not saying from one moment that any of this is easy; our thoughts, feeling and reactions are a powerful and integral part of our being, they are essentially who we are... and to question them, particularly when we are in the middle of a testing time, under pressure, surrounded by internal noise, is an almighty challenge in itself. So let me leave you with a short verse from Exodus that I hope encapsulates everything I have been trying to say; the Israelites are trapped between the pursuing Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea in front of them, and in this seemingly hopeless situation Moses assures them; 'The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still'.

Michael Grist, 8/5/22