

Epiphany 8

Genesis 1. 1-23; Matthew 6. 25 to end

I wonder how the reading from Matthew this morning made you feel. Did it fill your head with lovely soft pictures of the countryside - birds flying freely and luxurious meadows filled with wild flowers waving in the breeze? Did it prompt you to get your priorities right and put aside the desire for luxuries that you don't really need? Did it make you think - "Don't worry - life is worry; I come here to forget my worries, just for a while each week?"

The Anglican lectionary is used in many countries - the citizens of Christ Church may well have heard that Gospel today - what will they make of it? What of those who are living in camper vans their homes destroyed? Or what would people in Tripoli, Libya, captive in their own homes, fearful of being gunned down.

You see how much context matters when listening to the Gospel. It is so easy to look just at the surface of a message, or to stop searching for the message of Jesus, so you leave yourself with an impossible task that forces you either to reject the Christian message outright or put it in a box marked "Sundays only."

The passage we heard today comes about two thirds of the way through Jesus' radical teaching which we call the "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus' audience were living under the heavy influence of an occupying force, the Romans, and the demands of an law ridden Jewish faith. One of the most crushing of the beliefs of the Jewish faith was that bad things happened to you because of your sins or the sins of your father. The sermon kicks this belief into touch. "God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." In fact the whole sermon is more about asking people to step into an attitude than to learn and adopt a whole new set of rules.

Jesus says "Do NOT worry" but what does he tell us to do. I want us to use the King James Bible to help us discover what Jesus is saying to us today. That Bible says "Consider the lilies of the field." "Consider" - a word that says much more than "look". If you consider you might have consideration and if you have consideration you care and if you care you know something

about the thing you care about. I am going to give you some flowers. For just a few moments can we spend time really looking at this gift of creation. Consider it in all its finery. Perhaps share with one another the things that you notice; the thing that makes this flower flowery.

(A few minutes with flowers and music)

So what happened in that time? You were in the moment; you were in a place that accepted the present and for a while did not look to the future.....

I've bought with me a waist coat. Now I can stand in two places. I can stand here and say - "Why this waistcoat is not all that valuable; it hasn't got a label inside; it's even got a hole in it where someone has obviously tried unsuccessfully to iron it. It won't keep me very warm. Oh, I may as well chuck it...."

Or I can stand over here; " I love this waistcoat. I've had it for around 20 yrs and it just feels part of my story. My friend, Yvonne, made it for me for Christmas and so I always think of her. Look, there's the hole I made with it when I tried to iron it on Christmas day - I was so scared she would notice it and be upset. I shall never part with this waistcoat."

I'm not trying to be holy but I think the latter is the Jesus attitude; the Jesus space.

In our times, in this day and age, in the 21st century I think that as a society we are encouraged to think in the first way. The questions we have are about how much something is worth; whether we can get it cheap enough; whether we will have enough; what we will get in return. It's all about contracts and once the contract has been completed the relationship is over. So, we can go to the Middle East, in the midst of a non violent attempt to establish democracy and offer them arms. So, we can demand cheap food for ourselves without a thought for the producers of that food be it farmers from this country or abroad. So, we can grab cheap clothes with glee without a thought for the sweat shops that have enabled the clothes to be brought at a cut price - because our common humanity does not come into the contract. It's only about money, what we want, satisfying the things that we are worried about losing or not having.

"Do not worry consider things...." Consider that God loves you and everyone else to. Consider that we do have a relationship with the whole of humanity. Consider that God created the earth and said that it was "good." He appointed us as stewards. Jesus asks us to be his hands on earth. The contract is different because we can't be certain of gain in this world; bad things do happen to good people; tragedy and suffering are real as well as all the excitement of the joy of life; natural disasters bend and break whole communities. As Christians we know that Jesus knows the pain and the loveliness of it all too and that he will never cease to be with us and to love us. Because he teaches us that God is "love" - not "fear"; "loneliness"; "worry"; "stress". The contract is simply love but it doesn't just go up and down; The contract spreads around, to others as we enter into it and stand in that different space. A Jesus space.