

## SERMON FOR ORDINARY SUNDAY 26A 2020

We are told it's a woman's prerogative to change her mind. Why should women claim that privilege for themselves? Surely men too can change their mind with equal regularity. I believe we should all be able to change our minds. If we cannot change our minds then we are in real trouble. Having a fixed mind, being unable to admit to any view other than our own, will lead to a most unfortunate bigotry. Fixed minds are really very paralyzing. They prevent us moving from where we are in our thinking to a new place. Fixed minds mean there can be little room for growth, no excitement of discovery, no joy in reaching new goals. We see this in our politics where if one changes their mind it is seen as some sort of weakness or at worst a failure of character.

Jesus knew that religious people are more prone to becoming set in their ways than others. Religious people seem to close their minds more easily than others. But this isn't just true of what we might traditionally call religious people. We have in a sense seen the rise of a new secular religion, the religion of so called 'social justice', and intersectional politics. This has become indistinguishable with religious movements with its own dogma, heresies and judgements and inability to listen to others. People, whatever they believe tend to become closed minded.

That's why Jesus often spoke as he did to the religious leaders of his day. These are the people who said they were working for the kingdom of God. These were the ones who claimed to keep the law.

2

Jesus contrasted their attitudes with tax collectors and prostitutes. It must have been a bit of a shock for such holy people to be contrasted with those who were considered to be the dregs of society. Jesus suggests we need to be like the tax collectors and prostitutes.

How could Jesus claim that tax collectors and prostitutes were making their way into the Kingdom of God before the chief priests and elders of the people? The answer is, very simply, that the tax collectors and prostitutes first said “no” to God, but then changed their minds. The chief priests and elders of the people said “yes” to God, and did nothing about it. They didn’t change their lives to fit with their words. Jesus says there is a continual need to re-align ourselves with God to ensure our words and our actions agree. The message is clear. If we say “yes” to God, if we say we work for the kingdom,

then our words and our actions must agree. It’s no good saying one thing and doing another.

3

This process of conversion goes on through life. It’s not a once for all event as many Christians claim but a continual joy to place ourselves on God’s side. The religious leaders Jesus spoke to had closed their minds to anything other than what they knew. They were unable to hear what Jesus was saying.

People often suggest that many of the world’s problems are caused by religion. I think they are more often caused by closed minds. Maybe one causes the other. As Jesus realised, religious people seem to be more closed minded than others. Closed minds by those who deal with the nations of the world can lead to some unfortunate consequences as well.

We are also wise to think of our own attitudes. When we are not willing to shift from our position, is it because we cannot bear to think of doing something another way, or is there a fundamental principle involved.

4

It's unfortunate for us as Christians who talk so much about new life if we also have closed minds. We are not allowing our words and actions to agree. New life demands a freedom to experience new things. New life is about growth and there is no growth if we close our minds.

I am aware that when it comes to decision making in the Christian community there are often many different points of view to be considered. We may disagree with others and think they are wrong. When decisions are made what happens next is really important. Even though we may disagree, can we stay together as community? The splits that so often happen are

not what we would want. The unity of the community is important. It doesn't mean we have to agree all the time. But it does mean we should stay together.

5

This is what Paul was concerned about when he wrote to the Philippians. "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Paul repeats himself to stress the importance of unity within the community of faith. This is not uniformity where everyone has to be the same. This is the kind of unity that comes from a concern for the needs of each other. "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." This is about attitudes. The actual behavior required is left to the hearers to work out for themselves.

We also see here the beginnings of the closed mind being opened. If we seek the interests of others we can no longer hold our own opinions so rigidly. Paul reminds us we are all baptized into the body of Christ and it is from him that our unity comes. We are to seek the same humility as Christ did when he became one of us.

6

Today's gospel is a reminder to us that our words and actions must agree. Do we say no, and then change our minds and do what we are asked like the tax collectors and prostitutes. Or do we say yes and then not change our actions to agree with our words. Open minds, willing to look at change, at things new, are the sorts of minds we should find in those who seek the same humility of Christ. This attitude is going to be needed more than ever as we move into a changed world following the pandemic. We are going to have to try new ways of connecting with people, we may

have to leave some things behind that we have always cherished. For God is always moving us into new things and new experiences in order that we may grow as people of faith.

If we allow this then we will experience the transforming power of God who will give us new life. Life abundant. Amen