

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect**

Gracious Father,  
by the obedience of Jesus  
you brought salvation to our wayward world:  
draw us into harmony with your will,  
that we may find all things restored in him,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

**Romans 7:15-25a**

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end**

‘But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,  
“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

## Sermon

I wonder whether you have ever felt misunderstood. I used to think that it was pretty hard for my brother growing up. He is the youngest of three children, with two older sisters, both of whom did well at school, and tended to conform to the teachers' – and parental – expectations. I sometimes wonder whether he felt that he was seen as much in comparison with us as on his own merits. His own teenage rebellion would probably have seemed less extreme if one of his sisters had paved the way.

Within my own experience, I remember going to university and finding that many of the ways I had been viewed up until that time were no longer relevant in this new environment. What was labelled "swotty" at school was pretty much taken for granted at university. Yet having been considered pretty "posh" at school, I was undoubtedly betrayed by my Bracknell roots at university. It's hard to be posh when you're from Bracknell. I remember two good friends laughing together because among our friendship group at university, they were just considered "northern" whereas in Yorkshire, they were both keenly aware of the differences between their accents and what it meant about their background.

When I went to Australia for my fortieth birthday and saw my cousins, I was taken aback when they described my uncle as being quiet and reserved. When we were young and my uncle still lived in the UK, his occasional visits were highlights of our year. He was the fun uncle who spoiled us with all the things Mum and Dad wouldn't let us have, allowed us to climb up his legs and turned us upside down. Different circumstances and responsibilities, and the passage of time can bring out different aspects of our personality.

Sometimes we see a similar thing on television. I'm a secret fan of ITV3 and the Drama channel – both of which show countless detective drama series. Have you noticed how often they put together two contrasting characters? Inspector Morse, the cerebral, sensitive, introverted detective with Sergeant Lewis, the Geordie family man. And when Lewis became an inspector, he was partnered with another University-educated sergeant to maintain the contrast. Within the stories, there is a recognition of the importance of the differences in the characters because the variety allows for different perspectives, and makes success – in this case, solving the crime – more likely. But it's also important to remember that, if paired with another Geordie family man, we might notice different aspects of Lewis's personality and character. Just as for each of us, different aspects of our character are seen among different groups and in different situations.

This morning's gospel reading is really all about misunderstanding. It's about failing to see; to notice; to observe. By this stage, the way Jesus is speaking has an air of frustration. In the opening he says: 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

He goes on to explain the source of his frustration. That people's response to John the Baptist - the ascetic, who knew his role was to prepare the way for Jesus, and called people to repent, to turn their lives around - was to accuse him of being possessed. Yet when Jesus himself came, eating and drinking with people, they accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton. Both John the Baptist and

Jesus, each in their different ways, pointed people towards love, truth and wholeness, yet, in spite of their contrasting manners, both were rejected and spurned.

And before we get too confident that we would, of course, have welcomed and listened to both John the Baptist and Jesus, perhaps we need to take a moment to pause and ask ourselves whether that is really true. Or perhaps more importantly to ask ourselves where it is that we might be failing to hear God's word within our own context. Who it is that we see in a particular way, and assume could never have anything to teach or show us.

One of the phrases that is often used in church circles is that of "echo chambers". We all know that even just within the Church of England there is a range of theologies and church traditions. I believe it's a positive thing that we find different churches which enable people to encounter God using a language and style of worship that those attending find fulfilling and enlightening. The challenge is when we start to think that one is right and the other wrong. And that is more likely to happen when we only encounter people from within our own tradition – our own echo chamber.

The same can probably be said for political views. How much easier do we find it to read the newspaper whose editorial echoes our own perspective? And how important it is that we allow ourselves to be challenged by other perspectives, too.

In recent weeks, the Black Lives Matter campaign has focused our attention once again on the issue of race, forcing us to recognise what we had perhaps chosen to ignore. That people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups within our own society experience significant prejudice, both individually and societally. If we are tempted to think that we have got racial equality sorted out, the evidence of Black Lives Matter reminds us that we really haven't, however uncomfortable that might be to acknowledge.

I opened by asking whether you had ever felt misunderstood. It is something that we have all experienced, but for some it is a more regular aspect of daily life. The gospel reading tells us two crucial things. It reminds us that truth is often revealed to us by little children. My experience with primary age children is that they accept others at face value. They simply are not bothered by difference. What an important reminder that is for us to get to know individuals for who they are rather than for what they might appear.

And the second crucial part of the gospel reading is the reminder that God knows each one of us as we are. So, even when we feel misunderstood by others, we can always rest in God's presence, knowing that we are fully known, fully accepted and fully loved.

Amen