

The Gospel for today is not an easy Gospel. It ranks right along with the story of Jesus tossing the moneychangers out of the Temple and is about as much in character as the story of Our Savior cursing the fig tree because it bore no fruit.

What do we do with the Gospel, today? It runs so contrary to what most clergy like to talk about that many pastors simply ignore it. When it comes up in the Lectionary, they use the occasion to preach about something else. I have to tell you that is truly a temptation. But to do that is to ignore an important truth, both about our Lord and about us. We want to think of Jesus as always loving, always kind, and always cool and emotionally even. Well Jesus was always loving and, when kindness was appropriate, he was very kind, but he was also very real and a “no nonsense” kind of guy. And his reality meant that he was always honest. He did not say what people wanted him to say. He spoke God's truth. And the fact that God loves us, that he sent his Son into the world to redeem us, to bring us to holiness, does not alter the reality of base human nature. Last Sunday we heard, in the Gospel, that it was God's great pleasure to give us the Kingdom, but that does not mean that we automatically have it.

Jesus saw the reality of human nature and it grieved him to the core. In Christian understanding, humanity's natural condition is turned inward and is self-serving. That state of being is precisely what we call sin. Sin always arises from the application of selfishness. Sin always is focused on the appeasement, the aggrandizement of the self. It is complicated by, and this is an important point, it is complicated by an incredible personal blindness to this reality. We go through life essentially blind to our self-focus, unless we are exceptionally mature and insightful.

Realizing this, we can begin to understand the where our Lord was coming from in the Gospel this morning. We can also begin to understand why the Church, enamoured as it is with the theological concepts of love, grace and forgiveness, still insists that the faithful hear the words of this Gospel passage today. The Gospel today is a wakeup call; a warning that we hope is an early warning and not a call to close the barn door after the cows have escaped.

There are two points to today's Gospel. The first is that because Christianity is radically opposed to the selfishness of the world, Christianity always is going to be divisive. Therefore, the Christian will not find life easy going. This sounds strange, because as we know, Christians are taught to forgive, to turn the other cheek. But that doesn't mean that the Christian's adversary is going to do likewise. The Christian message, proclaimed and lived out, always brings a reaction and sometimes that reaction is hostile.

The second point is a warning that God holds us accountable. The time of accountability may be closer than we think. Jesus said, “You know how to interpret the weather. Why don't you know how to interpret your own reality?” There is no time like now to take on

the Gospel armor, to stand up to evil wherever you find it. There is no time like now to proclaim the goodness of Christ by thought, word and deed. The time to be Christian is now, while we can still choose to follow our Lord, while there is still time to choose to be his disciple. *Amen*