



“True teaching and teacher?”

A service sheet to guide reflections
on and around Sunday 25th October 2020

Introduction

As the autumn draws on and our Gospel readings approach the final chapters of Matthew, Jesus sums up his teaching through the Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbour. This week we will be thinking about Jesus’ core teaching and what it means to be a true teacher.

Our call to worship: words from an African song from the Cameroon (see last page):

**“He came down that we might have love, x3
Hallelujah for evermore”.**

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PKMuSs_OEs)

Hymn: Lord Jesus Christ you have come to us (*Singing the Faith 594*)

A song to reminds us of the teaching of Jesus through his life

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| <p>1 Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
you are one with us,
Mary's Son ;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in ;
Jesus, our love for you we sing,
living Lord.</p> <p>2 Lord Jesus Christ,
now and every day,
teach us how to pray,
Son of God.
You have commanded us to do
this, in remembrance, Lord, of you ;
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord.</p> | <p>3 Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
born as one of us,
Mary's Son ;
led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free ;
living Lord Jesus, help us see
you are Lord.</p> <p>4 Lord Jesus Christ,
we would come to you,
live our lives for you,
Son of God.
All your commands we know are true ;
your many gifts will make us new ;
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord.</p> |
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Patrick Appleford (b. 1925)

A way into prayer

In today’s reading we will hear Jesus’ call to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. As we move into prayer you might like to think of someone who has been a good neighbour to you in these strange times? Let us thank God for those who show us love.

God, you are our great and true teacher.
In the dappled sunlight, through the blazing
leaves of autumn, and the produce of the
earth, we learn the generosity of your love.
In the children at play, laughing in the
school yard, you teach us how to relax and
play.
In the mother taking on the world to
nourish and protect her children, we learn
the toughness of your love.

In the father bathing a new born baby, we
see the tenderness of your love.
In the greeting of a neighbour and help
given unexpectedly, we learn the greatness
of your provision.
In the faithfulness of your followers, we
learn the nature of Christ and are
transformed.
With grateful hearts, minds and souls may
we love you in return.

Amen

Prayer of confession

When our sharing of the gospel has been shallow:

Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When our words have been empty:

Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When we have given nothing of ourselves and offered no kindness or depth of care:

Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When we have not lived what we have preached:

**Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.
Amen.**

Bible Reading Matthew 22: 34-46

Our Bible reading starts with the third of three questions put to Jesus as the religious leaders and authorities seek to challenge his authority.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. ³⁵ One of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question. ³⁶ "Teacher," he asked, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and the most important commandment. ³⁹ The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' ⁴⁰ The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

⁴¹ When some Pharisees gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant is he?"

"He is David's descendant," they answered.

⁴³ "Why, then," Jesus asked, "did the Spirit inspire David to call him 'Lord'? David said,

⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet.'

⁴⁵ If, then, David called him 'Lord,' how can the Messiah be David's descendant?"

⁴⁶ No one was able to give Jesus any answer, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

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One interpretation of the passage taken from "Roots for the Churches" 2014

After the Sadducees, it is the Pharisees' turn to test Jesus' authority. This is not necessarily from sinister motives – Jewish teachers are fond of debate and questioning – though by this stage in the narrative, we can be forgiven for being suspicious. Jesus is faced with a much-discussed issue: Which of the law's over 600 commands is the most important? His answer brings together the opening words of what is called the Shema (Deuteronomy 6.5, "Love the Lord your God) and adds on Leviticus 19.18 (Love your neighbour as yourself).

Jesus agrees with those rabbis who say love for God and neighbour forms the foundation of Jewish law. But now, in the Temple precincts, it is significant that he gives no mention of worship or sacrifice, a major pre-occupation in the law of Moses. Jesus comes to Jerusalem having endorsed the teaching of the prophets which said mercy is much more important than offering sacrifices (Matthew 9.13; 12.7). His priorities lie with the fundamentals: the nature of God, the centrality of relationships and community-building values, rather than on the particularities of beliefs and practices, with their potential to set one group against another.

Then Jesus takes the discussions in a new direction. He puts a question back to the Pharisees about their understanding of the Messiah. The Pharisees are expecting the Messiah will be a descendent of the great King David. David was a warrior who paved the way for the building of the Temple and a messiah who, as 'son of David', would continue to use weapons of war and give pride of place to a temple. That Temple, by its separate areas for Jews and Gentiles, women and men, and lack of hospitality towards disabled people and children, endorsed a divided world. Jesus uses the opening words of Psalm 110 to suggest a new possibility. By calling the messiah 'lord', David brings the analogy of 'like father, like son' to an end. What kind of messiah can God's people expect? What will the world he brings look like? What difference will a messiah who is not David's son make to a world divided by privilege, learning, beliefs, race, gender, health? Jesus' messianic questions silence an audience bent on testing him. But the issues he raises remain to this day. (From *Roots on the web*)

Comment

When a friend of mine started out as a teacher in the 1980s she was surprised to find in her school all the pupils called the teachers by their first names. Another difference from my experience of learning, came when I tried to help my children with their maths homework as I discovered they were being taught a completely different way of doing division from the way I had learnt! Teaching styles and even sometimes the content of what is taught has changed radically over the years. Some of us might lament the loss of the learning of times tables by heart and think it was essential teaching, yet the next generations of architects and pharmacists still seem to be able to do their sums accurately without having to learn times tables by rote. So maybe the kind of teaching doesn't always matter?

What about when it comes to our faith? For some people the style of teaching has not changed much over the years, with a preference for a lengthy exposition of a topic from the front. For others the best way to learn is by visual explanation or by debate. The teachers at the time of Jesus certainly liked to debate. Jesus himself often used the tricky question as a way to engage his listeners' hearts and minds.

The style of teaching is maybe not as important as the content. We can certainly track development in the content of what people understood about God across the Scriptures. Jesus re-interprets the law and applies it in a fresh way. With his emphasis on the love of God, neighbour and self, he does seem to put the focus more on relationships than on beliefs and ritual practices. Yet at the same time he puts a lot of energy into explaining matters to his disciples and giving reasons why they should follow his way.

The effect of a good teacher and good teaching can be profound - totally life-changing in fact. The good teacher will, like Jesus, always back up their words with their actions.

I was very moved this year to hear that during the worst of the lockdown a head teacher and assistant head in Grimsby were delivering packed lunches to scores of children from their school. The children were usually in receipt of school meals. Their teachers knew when these children couldn't come to school they would go hungry. So they made up lunches and walked and drove miles to deliver them. The hunger of the children was also the first thought for a head teacher in Belfast this week when he learnt the school half-term was going to last for two rather than the normal one week. To me, these are true teachers in the mould of Jesus.

The truth of the teaching will always be born out in the truth of the living. In today's passage Jesus teaches that in order to truly be in a relationship with God, a person will be truly loving of their neighbour and themselves. As the new Messiah, Jesus is living this love to break down barriers and raise up the weak, rather than trampling over people in self-aggrandizement. It's the kind of true teaching we can celebrate around us today. It's also the kind of true teacher a relationship with God will turn us into.

Questions for reflection

1. Who has been a true teacher to you?
2. What questions would you like to ask Jesus?
3. What questions does today's Bible reading raise about the priorities of the church?

A way into prayer

Spend a moment thinking again about your neighbours – maybe moving along the street or the region in your mind's eye. What do you know about their hopes, their needs, their anxieties? Is there a small kindness you could do for them today? Pray for them by name where you can. If there are difficulties, ask for reconciliation and healing in any broken relationships.

Prayers for others

Lord Jesus, the lawyer came to you, thinking he knew all the answers, but your words caused him to consider new directions.

We pray for all those in authority and positions of power, that they will not always assume their way is right. May they always be open to move in new directions.

We pray for those who are facing difficult choices about lifestyle, work or health; may they realise new directions are possible with you.

The lawyer came to put Jesus' beliefs to trial but the lawyer's own faith became tested.

We pray for all whose faith is going through testing times due to sickness, pain of loss, world events, actions of society or personal searching.

Jesus, you also went through times of testing and trial; be close to them so they may know reassurance.

The Pharisees were afraid to answer Jesus.

We pray for those who hear the words of Jesus but are afraid to respond.

We pray for the Church, that it will speak out without fear, offering to all the good news of your loving forgiveness.

The Pharisees dared not ask Jesus any more questions.

We pray for those who are reluctant to turn to you for the answers in their lives.

In a moment of silent prayer, we bring to Jesus questions deep in our hearts...

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Amen.

God of all people and nations, we pray for your Church throughout the world.

For those who face hardship and opposition:

strengthen them in heart and soul and mind.

For those who feel their ministry is bearing no fruit:

encourage them in heart and soul and mind.

For those divided among themselves:

unite them in heart and soul and mind.

For those facing great change:

support them in heart and soul and mind.

For those looking for fresh new ways to reach out to their community:

inspire them in heart and soul and mind.

Upon all your people, Lord:

pour out your heart, your soul and your mind through the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Lord's prayer

Hymn: Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love (*Singing the Faith* 249)

*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love;
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

- 1 Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
master who acts as a slave to them.
- 2 Neighbours are rich folk and poor,
neighbours are black folk and white,
neighbours are nearby and far away.

- 3 These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love.
All these are neighbours to us and you.

- 4 Kneel at the feet of our friends,
silently washing their feet.
This is the way we should live with you.

*North Ghanaian song
adapted by Tom Colvin (1925–2000)*

Blessing

Be willing to learn, willing to share, willing to love, willing to care.

Be blessed in your journey of faith today, this coming week and always. **Amen.**

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*(I learned this week from the Methodist prayer handbook that children in some parts of the Cameroon have not been able to go to school for three years. This is terrible and puts some of our issues with teaching into perspective as well as being a point for prayer)