

Pentecost 15, 25/8/2013, Holy Trinity

Luke 13:10-17

To be exclusive and pure or to be inclusive and perhaps not so pure: that is the question for the Church as a whole.

There are books of the Bible that argue the need to be exclusive and pure and other books that argue the need to be inclusive, tolerant and universal in the acceptance of others.

There are books devoted to the purity codes of Leviticus and other books devoted to reaching beyond custom and law in the attitude of compassion and justice to accept people of all backgrounds into the community of God's people.

What, then, is Jesus' perspective in this matter?

Luke, in this morning's Gospel narrative, shows us Jesus stepping outside the limitations of tradition and beyond the customs of the Sabbath and the purity code.

Jesus cures a woman who does not call out to him, but whom he sees and calls to come to him.

This woman who is crippled would not be allowed into the synagogue, first, because she is a woman and secondly, because she is crippled and this illness is seen at that time as the work of Satan.

This incident suggests which side Jesus takes in the exclusive – inclusive debate.

Yet, unlike some others such as Paul the Apostle who is dealing with the problems of an expanding faith into the Gentile world, Jesus does not ride roughshod over the Law.

In another chapter Luke reports Jesus as saying: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for a stroke of a letter of the Law to be dropped."

Jesus upheld biblical law.

The difference between Jesus and the leader of the synagogue in this narrative is in interpretation.

Both Jesus and the leader of the synagogue would affirm that we must love God with the whole heart and soul and strength.

The difference is in the answer to the question of "What is God like?"

Is God's chief concern to be obeyed in every dotted 'i' in the law or is God's chief focus on love and care for people and the creation?

Jesus certainly shatters the status quo in this incident.

He announces a new way to do God's business.

In Jesus we see that God's Word is alive and active.

It is not all dead and static.

God's Word is alive and active in to-day's world.

God's Word was alive and active in the Exodus drama of coming out of Egypt, in Abraham's call and obedience, in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament that sent out a call to care for those in need and for justice for the poor.

God's Word was active and alive in Jesus and in the life of the early Church and is still alive and active in the world to-day.

In our ministry as a parish and as individuals we need to look at the Word of God in the Scriptures as a whole and not to take individual bits that please us but rather to see what God is like.

Do not allow the Church as a whole and our parish and us as individuals to be paralysed like the woman in to-day's Gospel narrative.

Rather, let God's Word, Jesus Christ, heal our infirmities that we may be loving and caring towards all people.