

Gospel reflections for Sunday 16th February 2020

[Matthew 5:21-37](#)

If we were to ask people on the street what they think Christianity is about, I am sure we would hear mention of the commandments. A common misconception is that Christianity is all about keeping the rules in order to win favour with God. In this week's reading Jesus talks about the commandments and actually raises the stakes. Jesus makes clear that following him isn't just about performing certain behaviors or keeping a set of rules. Following Jesus involves the inner life just as much as the outer life. It involves a new heart and with it, new thoughts, attitudes and emotions.

Jesus connects the dots for his listeners from outward acts to internal orientation, from murder to anger, from adultery to lust. It is one thing to behave rightly. It is another thing entirely for one's heart to be oriented toward love. Just as it is easier to make a sacrifice at the temple than it is to do justice (Micah 6), so it is easier to keep the commandment against murder than it is to avoid anger in one's heart. (Oden A 2011)

Following Jesus means looking into our hearts and inner life as well. Keeping the law without love is no more than a 'resounding gong or clanging cymbals' (1 Corinthians 13:1).

This is a really important message for schools and early childhood services where we have many rules as educational institutions charged with the safety and learning of our children and students. How easy is it for the students to think that the rules are related to Christianity rather than government requirements? At the same time, worship and Christian Studies which focusses too heavily on the commandments can convey God as a keeper of checklists and a Christian as simply a 'good' person.

The more challenging message to convey is that Jesus is more interested in our hearts and what flows from them. This is quite a radical message for today's world that is obsessed with the outer life; how we look, what we do and who we portray ourselves to be. This reading reminds that Jesus came to re-orient the internal landscapes of our lives. Jesus gives the disciples a new way of life, not rejecting the tradition, but building upon it. It is a way of life that demands more and promises more.

It is a life abundant, a life in all its fullness.

Other resources

Love (video) <https://www.thefuelcast.com/library/2019-11-28-love-r3>