

Text: Matthew 15:10-20 (NIV)

Sunday 16th August 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

A few weeks ago, we began this new series where we are turning to a few moments in the book of Matthew where Jesus called people to Himself. Specifically, we were looking to see what these encounters might teach us about being church together, that we might then have clarity about the why, the what and the how of church life, both in this time of lockdown and when we start back with some of our more normal activities. So, what ideas or teaching or values of Jesus might guide us in this time and in the future?

Well, we've seen that Jesus invites us into relationship with Himself, He invites us also into His purpose, and Jesus invites us into family, His family, the family of God. With regard to purpose, we turned to the Church Without Walls Report, which said that the core purpose **of the church** is 'to invite, encourage and enable people to be disciples of Jesus Christ.' Today I want to explore one idea for how we may enable people to be disciples of Jesus.

Boys and girls, you've had a big week this week – schools and nurseries have started back, and it was lovely to see so many of your pictures. I'm sure your folks have even got pictures of last year, and so they can see how much you've grown and matured. Today is also our Moving Up Service, which is a time of year where we mark your development, your maturing, within the church family.

I wonder, adults in our congregations, as we see our young people mature, moving up the school years, moving up the Sunday School groups, how do we hope to see them mature? What hopes do we have for them? Let's take a minute to think or talk about that at home.

(PAUSE)

I wonder what you came up with, feel free to put it in the Live Chat. Do we hope for our young people to achieve a path towards work and fulfilment? Maybe we also hope for them to find love, **or stay active in** our church family? On the issue of faith, do our hopes for our young people include more than Sunday attendance, or even more than diligence in reading the Bible or prayer? Our passage today speaks to these hopes, but it will also ask some tough questions about our own faith.

Jesus is with the disciples, surrounded by a crowd, and surrounded also by the religious leaders and teachers of His time. They've asked some thorny, difficult questions, and after answering them Jesus calls the crowd to Himself. **He says**, 'What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.' (v11) Now, it may sound odd to us, or if we've grown up in the church, it may sound a bit obvious. But to the folks of the day, this was radical teaching, because they put so much focus on external things, on the rules and regulations of their religion, such that they forgot the issues of the heart.

A little later on the disciples ask Jesus for an explanation of His teaching **and Jesus says**, '...the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these

defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts...'
(v18-19) This echoed His earlier teaching, **where He said,**
'For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.' (Matt.
12:34) I'm sure many of us can think of people whose
words reveal the condition of their heart; words of
comfort and encouragement from a heart of love; yet in
another, words of criticism or judgment from a heart that
is wounded or bitter.

In all of this, Jesus wants to help His disciples realise that
following Him includes having their hearts changed,
maturing in His likeness. Jesus had also **earlier said,** 'Be
perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'
(Matt. 5:48) Not that He expects us to reach perfection,
but that we would grow in the likeness of our heavenly
Father.

This would have shocked the people around Jesus – to them, maturity was about being religious, about duty, about stringent keeping of the rules. They had forgotten, or not been taught, that God is concerned with who we are on the inside, in our heart, and that until the heart is changed, external acts which seem good or tick the religious box, will never suffice. **Jesus wanted to help** the people see that following Him, being His disciple, is much more than superficial, outward displays of religion – instead Jesus had come to show that the outward acts are meant to flow from a changed heart.

So, let's go back to those hopes we have for our young people. Did you mention this? Did you mention the idea of them having a relationship with Jesus, and through that relationship the character of Jesus being matured in

them? **Or did we simply list ideas** such as going to church, reading their bible, praying, serving other people? These things are not bad things of course, and in the doing of them we hope that young people will connect with Jesus. Yet the danger is that we simply pass onto them a list of traditions, expectations, religious acts, such that they think this is all that makes up Christianity. Is this what we are passing on to the next generation?

If we are, if this is what we tend towards, could it suggest that this is all we think it means to be a disciple of Jesus? Have we reduced our faith to a list of things to be done? Or is there more to our faith? Can we speak of a relationship with Jesus which changes our hearts, and so our lives?

I've thoroughly valued the Testimony Tuesday evenings we've had so far, and if you've not watched them yet, then you can do so on our YouTube Channel or listen to the latest recording via our phone line. In every one, there have been stories about how God has changed people's lives and we'll be having another Testimony Tuesday on the 8th of September. If you would be willing to share something of your faith story, then please let me know. Specifically, it would be helpful to hear about recent things God has been doing – maybe something He has spoken to you about from the Bible, maybe an idea He has given you, or something He has prompted you to do. Now I'm willing to accept any story, but if there were any recent examples, I'd love to hear them – **because if following Jesus** is more than just a list of rules, if it's more than turning on YouTube on a Sunday morning, then

every one of us who calls our self a “Christian” should have something to share. We should be able to share how God is changing us now, from the inside out, how Jesus is helping us mature as His disciples, children who are growing up in the family likeness. I could name 2 or 3 areas just now where God working on my heart, leading me, maturing me. The areas of justice are particularly at the forefront of my thinking these past weeks, both for the poor and with regard to racial relations.

Now, I wouldn't be surprised, if some of you said that this is not part of your faith; that you don't know how God is wanting you to mature, or even how He might do that. This takes me back to the word 'enable' – that part of the core **purpose of the church**: 'to enable people to be disciple of Jesus'. Sadly, for generations, the church has

not done well at this, the church has often focused on ticking the external religious acts, but has not shown people a way of living in relationship with Jesus such that our hearts change. We need to do better at this. We need to find ways, as a group of churches, to enable people to follow Jesus, beyond simple religious observance, and into a way of life which matures the heart. **Our young people** today are not interested in ticking religious boxes. And there are many generations in our society, who write off the church, because of hypocrisy, or of an air of religious superiority, since they do not see the character of Jesus maturing and being evident in our lives.

Friends, in this time of restriction, in this season of change, with our hopes of our children, with our hopes for the future of our churches, I hope, I pray, that we

never return to a faith which is focused on a list of things to be done. Rather, may we invest now, may we pursue now, and in the future, a following after Jesus, which changes our hearts, maturing us in His likeness.

May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn...

HYMN *MP-708 To God be the glory*