

St Mark's Lutheran Church
Pentecost 5
Matthew 11:16-30
Pastor Ben Pfeiffer

Introduction

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. What is the best invitation you have ever received, apart from the invitation to return to worship at St Mark's? Is there one that stands out? A birthday, a wedding, an anniversary? An invitation that surprised you, honoured you or excited you? An invitation you didn't expect to receive or simply one that was a long time coming?

Today Jesus gives us the best invitation we could ever imagine. In fact, it's better, than we could ever imagine. *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* You see, Jesus knows what we really need in this life and he invites us to come to him to receive it. Rest for our souls. Peace within. To get us there, he offers us an observation, a denunciation, a revelation and only, in closing, an invitation. So, let's look at them in turn.

The Observation

Firstly, the observation. *"To what can I compare this generation?"* He says, *"They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'"* Jesus compares the people of his day to children inviting one another to play and dance and sing. But whether they are invited to play one game or the other, to sing a joyful song or a sombre one, they refuse take up the invitation.

They are childish, in the worst sense of the word, pouting, in a huff, unwilling to take part in anything that is suggested. They are resistant, and not just resistant, but according to the proverb, they are impossible to please. *"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"*

We begin to see Jesus' point. John the Baptist was too much of an ascetic for them, too separatist, too alarmist, too much law, too much 'fire and brimstone,' too brash, too unbalanced, too unpolished and therefore too quickly dismissed. Jesus, on the other hand, was too social, too common, too loose, too willing to spend time with the wrong type of people, too much gospel, too close to sinners, and so they dismissed him too.

John invited them to the funeral of repentance, but they wouldn't come. Jesus invited them to the wedding feast of forgiveness, and they still weren't interested. *"But wisdom is proved right by her deeds,"* Jesus says. Both John and Jesus proclaimed the wisdom of God, a wisdom that deserved to be listened to, and that still does, because it is always proved right in the end.

I wonder what observation Jesus would make about us, our generation or era. Are we also hard to please? Are we also quick to criticise, and what do our criticisms say about us? Do we lack the wisdom Jesus refers to? Max Lucado says, 'this age of information is the age of confusion.' Is it possible we become so occupied with information at the expense of wisdom, knowing the what but missing the why? I wonder what observation Jesus would make of us.

The Denunciation

Well his observation of the people of his day led to his denunciation, which is also important for us to hear, although hard for us to hear when it gets conveniently left out of the lectionary reading. But verse 20 tells us that, *'Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.'*

Jesus says, of the towns he had been working in, that had such great things been done, in far more troublesome places, like Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, they would have turned to God. He's trying to rouse them from their spiritual slumber and prick their collective conscience. Like if someone said to us, 'You Australians don't know how good you have it. If the people of Africa had half your prosperity, they would have double your gratitude. Or if the people of the Middle East had half your peace, they would have double your joy.'

Now, we don't like to the idea of being denounced, and that is fair enough. it is probably why these words get left out of the lectionary! But this is Jesus speaking. He's is no soap box preacher condemning us. It's our concerned teacher warning us or our trusted friend being honest with us. He's encouraging us to sit up and take notice of the blessings we have received and the importance of turning back to God again and again and again.

The Revelation

When we do, we hear this startling revelation. *'At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed*

them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.” “Let’s get back to basics,’ Jesus is saying. ‘Hard to please people, denounced cities, let’s get back to basics.’

The kingdom of God is in your midst. It’s right in front of you. It’s hidden from the wise and learned, the scribes and Pharisees, the sophisticated social elite, the educated upper class, those who lean too heavily on their own understanding, and it has been revealed to little children. It is accessible to all. Children don’t lean on their own strength and their own understanding like adults do. I was on placement in a school once and asked a question of a class. A little girl’s hand shot up in the air and I thought, here we go, this isn’t so hard! ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I don’t know,’ she told me quite confidently. ‘I don’t know.’

God reveals himself, through his Son, to those who know they don’t know, to those who don’t have all the answers, to those with a simple but beautiful child-like faith. There’s a lot we can learn from our smallest members and a lot God has to teach us and reveal to us through them. One commentator says, ‘no one is so great that God needs him, none so little that God cannot reach them’ (Schlatter). We may be hard to be please, slow to repent, but we are never, ever, beyond the reach of God.

The Invitation

And so, he offers us, this beautiful invitation, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* The invitation is to stop leaning on ourselves and start leaning on him, to stop flying solo and start flying as a team.

The yoke was the wooden crosspiece that connected two work animals. Jesus is saying, “Come work with me, be bound to me, I’ll carry your heavy load and you can carry my light one. I’ll carry your sin, you can carry my forgiveness. I’ll carry your pain. You can carry my joy.” Jesus invites us to come to him, when we feel overwhelmed by sin or sorrow or the trials and tribulations of this world. As one commentator says, ‘When the juice has been squeezed out of life and only the rind remains’ (Bruner). Jesus offers refreshment, not escape, but help, revitalisation, forgiveness, grace, rest for our souls. He is gentle. He is humble. And he so dearly wants us to come and learn from him, and live our lives with him, and discover the peace he offers, a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that is beyond our understanding. May this peace guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.