

Three weeks ago Colleen Pacey spoke of the Mary and Martha dilemma and two weeks ago David Anderson spoke from the section in Luke 11 about prayer – the request from Jesus disciples ‘Lord teach us to pray,’ Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer and the applications following conclude with that wonderful promise:

‘If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

The scene changes and we’re entering a different season now; remember we began this series with Luke’s foreboding words

9:51 ‘As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.’

Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem so I guess he also knew what would happen along the way

Luke 11:14-32

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. 15 But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ 16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

21 ‘When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

23 ‘Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

24 ‘When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house I left.” 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.’

27 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’

28 He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’

29 As the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. 31 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.

This is the first of two passages in Luke 11 that speak of the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day.

I'd like to comment on some issues the text raises.

1. Some of the crowd slandered Jesus

When Jesus gave the man the ability to speak again by driving out the demon (shouting of course, as you do) some accused him of working for the devil. Others demanded a sign to show he was who he claimed to be – we'll come to that later.

In answer to the accusation of working for the devil Jesus asked how can it be said that I'm working for Satan against Satan. No kingdom in which there's civil war can survive. No country in which there is civil war survives in a positive way – think Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan. Actually no church divided within can really stand either – lessons here to be thought through another day, plenty of evidence around us.

Jesus then says quite categorically, far from proving I'm on the devil's side, what happened to this man proved that the devil's citadel has been broken into; the strong man's castle has been breached and the Kingdom of God is here; the someone stronger has arrived – the point of verses 21-2.

These utterly religious people have actually slandered Jesus. There's nothing as cruel as this – slander is the making of false and damaging statements about someone or a group. I'm not sure I can say I'm free of this and I wonder if I'm not alone:

I can easily think the worst of someone

I question the motives of someone I dislike

I can repeat untruths and tell malicious tales and I can murder reputations over a teacup or by email which is the trendy thing to do – people send emails when they haven't got the courage to say the things they write about to a person's face. I'm amazed how personalities change behind the keyboard.

We're talking here about Jesus, the Son of God, our Saviour; and the people of his day – confronted by the evidence of his saving, delivering power, slandered him.

Jesus finished that section with the powerful statement:

'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.'

No neutrality

In another context Jesus says **'for whoever is not against you is for you.'** But the context is quite different there – here it's all or nothing. You're either in or you're out. You're either with me or you're not. So how is it with you?

2. The peril of the empty soul

It's not enough to tell someone to deal with what's wrong with them; you've got to fill a person with something – therefore we can never have a real faith that's based on negatives. It's no good basing our lives on what we're not to do. I think that's where Christians lost Sunday – Christians were so strong about what you weren't to do on Sunday but never suggested or offered alternatives. Therefore the better way to live and how to avoid evil is to fill our lives with good. I think that's what Donald McTaggart did. We never become nearer God's intentions by not doing things but by filling our days with that which is good, positive and helpful.

That's what the book *Finishing Well to the Glory of God* says:

***Wake up every morning knowing what you're going to do that day
Go to bed every night knowing that you helped someone***

3. Give us a sign Jesus!

The gathered clan wanted Jesus to do something sensational to prove he was God's Messiah. They couldn't see then and most Jews today don't see that Jesus is God's sign.

You do something Jesus so we'll know. I wonder if we still see this attitude – well you prove Jesus is who he said he was, that God is etc. etc. Of course the best proof that Jesus is who he claims to be is in our living.

I think of the song from *Jesus Christ Super Star*:

So you are the Christ you're the great Jesus Christ
Prove to me that you're no fool
Walk across my swimming pool

And Jesus said he was the sign – someone greater than Jonah, someone greater than Solomon.

It's going to get worse, after next week's slight intermission, Jesus takes the heavies on.