

Today is the 4th Sunday after Trinity, or perhaps, July 5th could be called the 1st Sunday after lockdown?

Preacher: Shirley Dudeney, Licensed Lay Minister

Maybe you are listening to me in your home via Zoom linked with other households via the wonders of the internet; or perhaps you are listening to me having found the service on facebook; or perhaps you are reading this via our church web site. You may be other members of your household, or you may be alone with God.

Wherever we are physically today, it is likely that none of us are in the same place emotionally that we were in just 3 months ago.

We have had to deal with so much. We have had to process often contradictory and incomplete advice about what we should be doing. We haven't been always been sure who to listen to, where we can find truth and wisdom in the midst of such uncertainty.

How many people can we be with? And where? How many bubbles can I be in and with whom? How do we greet each other? Should I be wearing a face covering? What is a safe distance? Should I drive or take the bus? Why is advice different in Scotland, Wales and, even Leicester?

It's a tiring business just trying to keep up with the latest guidance on a personal basis, but if you are running your own business, or have a position of responsibility in a charity, a faith or a local community group it can be overwhelming.

How can we negotiate these challenging times?

Our gospel reading today comes from Matthew 11. The context of Jesus's day was very different from our own, but people living then had the same challenge of deciding who they should listen to and whose advice they should be taking.

In verse 18, we are told that John the Baptist came neither eating or drinking. He was an austere leader and the crowds didn't like that and so criticised him – he has a demon, they said.

Then Jesus comes eating and drinking. He was a social leader but some didn't like that either and so criticised him too – he's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners they said.

It sounds like the gossip of the 1st century Palestine could be as brutal and critical as today's social media posts.

Jesus's response from verse 25 is remarkable.

First, he doesn't criticise the crowd or bemoan his own misunderstood position;... no he turns to his Father and says 'thank you' for your gracious will?

Maybe that could be a good starting point for us too!

Can we thank God for being alive at a time like this? For the gift of each new day?
For the good things we receive?

Second, Jesus makes an extraordinary claim. He says, v 27, that everything has been handed over to him by the Father and that access to the Father's knowledge comes only through him.

Jesus recognises his calling to be saviour of all.

We need to remember that his position was unique; we are not Jesus; we are not called to be saviour of all; we are not responsible for everything and everyone, ...but we are entrusted to do something – for such a time as this – in such a place as the one we inhabit.

Our calling is not a once and for all fixed thing; it will change as we travel through life. It has probably changed during these past 3 months. Do you recognise your calling; your task at the present time?

Later in Matthew 20 Jesus says that he came not to be served but to serve. Who are we to serve in this season? And remember, serving doesn't necessarily means doing...Jesus commended Mary not Martha.

And thirdly, Jesus offers us an invitation. In the midst of all the pressures that life places on us, Jesus simply says 'come to me'

If life has become too demanding; too confusing; too draining...come to Jesus and he will give you rest.

Come to Jesus and let him take from you the burdens you cannot and should not be carrying.

Come to Jesus and hand him your fear, your anxiety, your worries and concerns.

Come to Jesus, form a 'bubble' with him and let him give you something manageable. A purpose not a problem.

SO, where and how do we find true wisdom?

We find it by coming to God in humility and thanksgiving. We come to find rest, to have our false burdens lifted, to receive afresh our true calling; our true purpose, our true reason for living.

This is not a single, once and for ever event ... and thank God, Jesus's invitation was not just made to those who originally heard him in 1st century Palestine but continues to be made to us living in the 21st century.

Jesus invites us to return to him each and every day, to receive fresh wisdom, a fresh direction for our lives and to say 'thank you'

Jesus alone is our sure bedrock, our anchor, in these challenging and turbulent times.

His love alone remains constant.

Amen