

Sermon 22-09-13 'Faith is about Doing'
Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 Luke 16:1-13

Prayer: Lord, be with us as we navigate life constantly having to lean on you to do what you do in the midst of clamouring voices for our attention, our money, our priorities, our abilities and our love. May we be shrewd in dealing with the world and resist being seduced into its ways. Remind us that our faith is in you and doing things your way. Amen

The month of September is St John's Thanksgiving month concluding next Sunday, our Thanksgiving Sunday. *It has been* a tradition of St Johns since the early days to make an annual financial gift to the Lord's work here at St Johns that is over and above our regular tithing / giving. This year it has been agreed we will put our thanks offerings towards updating our heating needs in 'here' and the rest of the building. Just to repeat my comments from the past few weeks, it is unlikely we will be going as far as installing some kind of air pump / air conditioning system, professional quotes put that cost around \$20,000.00. Church leadership is not convinced it would be demonstrating responsible stewardship to do that, unless the Lord really lays on someone's heart that dedication and level of 'giving'. We have always been well blessed here by the level of giving the Lord does lay upon our hearts, so it is with real thanksgiving we observe this month. Thank you for the gifts received to date.

God's Pies has been part of Sunday morning sermons for the past month – today is no exception! We have looked at this video with its challenges from – faith choices; faith decisions; faith in God and now a 'faith is doing' perspective. God has supplied all we need all the 'pie', this is a faith understanding, how we use that and what we do with that is our joy, as a people of faith.

Show video.

God's Pies are given for us to share, what this video calls into question is the distribution pattern we employ with the 'pie' we have been given. How do you choose, make the faith decision to share all you have in life – including God's 'portion'? I am humbled when I am invited to hear how some of you do this – and how in a manner quite contrary to the video 'God's share' is the first 'cut' on a weekly basis. I am sure the Finance Team joins me in praying that the rest of us listen and follow! cV

I have been asked how I can preach the same 'stuff' and find something new to say! I am currently in the place of saying the 'new' has nothing to do with me and everything to do with the material I am given! Having had the God's Pies video as a basis and then how the Lectionary has been taking us through this part of Luke's Gospel, I would never have seen just how much Jesus taught about money and possessions challenging us to have a right (God's way), faith attitude!

It is not that Jesus is saying not to have or use or employ money and possessions – not at all in fact today it might be that (again) he is actively encouraging us to be adventurous with our finances and possessions... It's as if through Luke he is asking **whether we possess** or **are possessed by**. What is our attitude and what are the choices we make in faith that decide the priorities in life? Cv

How well do we *understand* what it is that God in Jesus asks of us? How hard are we committed to learning and refreshing our understanding of God as we move through life? Cv *What's that definition of insanity?* Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result? I 'heard' this emerging from the Jeremiah passage this week. The people have at least two expectations of God that are not met in this passage.

In verse 20 an old proverb is quoted – meaning that at the end of summer the barns are supposed to be full and ready to feed the people through winter... this is the expectation that God provides, as God always has. But this year it hasn't happened. The second expectation is that God is supposed to save

and deliver them, when they call – want – expect and to their horror it hasn't happened either. The Lord is absent; they are amazed and are suffering from what one scholar calls a crisis of faith. (HWallace)

Historically HWallace says the “Horses of the invaders from Babylon can be heard ‘snorting’ on the borders” of the land, exile looms and the people don't understand. The result they expected hasn't happened. They are doing exactly what they have always done, but God's not doing what is expected of him, *huh-why?*

And there lies the problem – they haven't changed their ways. They still worship graven idols and foreign gods and even the rewards from the harvest to keep them for another year. Not even the fertile, bountiful lands of Gilead can save them. They have it half right. God does love them to distraction; weeps for their plight, mourns for the horror they face, the slaughter ... is passionate about them. **But.**

But it seems what they don't remember / want to remember / **know** is that God is also passionate about being **first** in their lives, about truth, about justice and they have not kept their side up, in the faith relationship. Worshipping God, sharing what they receive from God, with God – would it have been so hard? **“Is it?”** the God's Pies video asked us today.

It's not if we could convince ourselves that this is the last picture in the story, *like the rest of the world*. It is our particular joy that we know it isn't the last picture, God is in the picture. It's what we do about that changes everything in our life and the lives of all people around us. God wants us to share firstly with him and then in appropriate relationship with everything around us including our money and possessions.

But even my use of the word appropriate is dubious in the light of the Gospel parable today. Once again Jesus is teaching about attitude to God's ways of ‘doing’ things in our world. This is a hard parable to read – but I thought W Loader had an interesting light to shed on it. He puts forward the idea that Jesus is defending his own behaviour and he is the rogue! **He is God's rogue**, basically making a loss for God because he keeps giving away grace and love and forgiveness with scandalous abundance. It is outrageous behaviour but as God's legitimate agent he has approval to do so!!!

The **clues** that lead Loader to this point, are that Jesus used debt more than once as a metaphor for sins and forgiving debt (eg. the Lord's Prayer). Central to the story is the fact that the rogue had no authorisation to go around cancelling or cutting people's debts. It was outrageous behaviour. But Luke has been telling us that Jesus' behaviour was also outrageous. His opponents were saying he had no right to go about welcoming sinners and **declaring God's forgiveness** to them. Jesus was a rogue in the system. They denied his authority to do so. As the master praised the sacked manager, so, claims Jesus, **God will approve** his ministry and his radical generosity, seen as appropriate or not, Jesus does it.

Now, Loader challenges us to go back and look at the rest of this chapter; wealth and exploitation are not simply a moral issue that Christians need to address, but **something quite central** to the Gospel of Jesus. No one is to be written off, because what people have held against others has been written off by the roguery of divine grace. That divine grace cancels prejudice and judgement of any kind that renders other people less than human and **without** rights or poor ‘because *they* deserve it’. Cv

Everyone is to have a piece of God's Pies and that can only happen if we 1. Remember and remind that God **is** in the picture, and 2. What we have is enough in faith to ensure divine grace is served regardless.

What **we do** with what we have is to trust in God and manage all we have by faith, and not by self.

What we do in faith matters, as Jesus says: Luke 16:10 (The Message) **10** Jesus went on to make these comments: If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things;” It matters what we do in faith with all that we have. Amen.