

Ordinary 22 B 2021 Song of Songs 2:8-13, James 1:17-27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 **Scott MALCOLM**

Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees couldn't be speaking a more different kind of language.

Many of you will know the weekly magazine, The Listener. I haven't been a subscriber for a while, but once it was a regular visitor to our house. It had all of the TV and radio listings for the week, articles and opinion pieces, business and food sections, letters to the editor and also a weekly cartoon.

There must have been many 1000's of Listener cartoons over the years, but one in particular caught my attention. It was when I was Minister of Ponsonby Baptist, well before Covid and lockdowns, before cell phones and fibre even.

Along from the church on Jervois Road is a small building called Letham Cottage. It has had numerous incarnations over the years, but during my time in Ponsonby, it was an art gallery.

I used to go in and out of Letham Gallery on my way home from work. One day they had an exhibition of some original drawings, by the then Listener cartoonist, Anna Crichton.

One had a particular impact on me. It was of an older man decked out with a paisley tie and speaking paisley language. He was speaking to another man, of a younger generation, with dreadlocks and talking in street graffiti script. I thought it was very, very clever, and as I had teenagers in the house at the time, very apt.

I hung it over the dining room table in the hope that it would remind me often that we are always in danger of speaking different languages and missing one another completely if we are not careful.

Well, Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees couldn't be speaking a more different kind of language.

The language Jesus is speaking is one of openness. Simply put, that God is available to everyone in Israel.

The scribes and Pharisees, on the hand speak, the language of separation. To them, God only comes to those who are separate, who are sacred, those who have performed their religious duty; correctly, rightly, properly.

They say if our hands are not washed in the proper ceremonial fashion ... we are unclean before God, and God will not accept us.

That God only comes to us when we are scrubbed and rubbed clean from the living we do in the world. It is only when that has been scoured from us, like the vessels in our story, that we are acceptable. Only when our lives are washed from all that is deemed by the "religious authorities" to be unclean, will God come near us.

Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees couldn't be speaking a more different kind of language.

Jesus says no, and calls the Pharisees and Scribes hypocrites.

It is important to know that hypocrisy here does not mean dishonest and insincere, but rather it's more original use, which was a word for play acting. What Jesus is meaning is that their religious lives are as unreal as the lives of actors in a play. This is no more true religion than a play is real life.

Jesus is opening up the love of God to more than those who "obey the authorities and do the right, religious things", he is opening God up, to all Israel.

Jesus then says to anyone who is listening, that the threat to life and living in God, the threat to holiness and God's coming to us, isn't from these kinds of external things, how we wash and clean our hands, what we do or don't eat, but from our own internal being ... it is the things that come out of our hearts that make us unclean.

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This was brought home to me again as I read a story in the Guardian, about a former Director of Scripture Union holiday camps in the UK, a man named John Smyth. Mr Smyth was also a QC, and was the go-to man for UK moral campaigner Mary Whitehouse, in her law suits against the British government on moral issues in the UK.

It emerged late in his career, that he was also a sadist and used to mercilessly beat young men with a cane, if they were caught doing what young men do, at the camps he was Director of, calling them sinners. Some nearly died, all were traumatised horribly. This behaviour carried on for many years until it eventually came to light.

I can only surmise, at Mr Smyth's reasoning for his actions, but I think it's safe to say he didn't understand Jesus' language, ... that it is what came out of **HIS** heart that was defiling ... and that scouring others in the name of holiness ... was uncleanness itself.

This is true, too, when I think of the terrible events at Kandahar airport on Thursday night.

Jesus and Mr Smyth and ISIS K couldn't be speaking a more different kind of language.

That it is from within us, that the threat to our life in God comes.

It is from our human hearts, that evil intentions flow: avarice, wickedness, deceit, envy, slander, pride, violence and ... murder. All these things come from within, and **they** defile a person.

Not, how we perform our religious duties.

Let's thank God that Jesus comes speaking a different language.

Let's continue to pray that we might be able to hear and understand that language ... and try really hard ... to put it into practise.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.