

Sermon: Don't t be laughed out of heaven!

Reading: Matthew 10:24-39

Introduction

Here is a challenge for you, when you have a few hours to spare! It came from an article I read this week which said, 'Write 500 words about something in the news, looking through the prism of your faith, but don't preach or say anything that will offend. Make sure your words contain enough theology to satisfy the remit, stay true to your faith, remembering that the majority of people don't share your belief.

If you are able you could be a candidate for Radio 4 thought of the day!

Radio 4 sets a challenging remit for 'Thought of the day'. This got me thinking, what if the Buddha, Confucius, Guru Nanak, Jesus Christ and Mohammad were tasked to write an article for "Thought of the day,' would they succeed speaking their message within the criteria of the 'thought if the day?' Out of the faith leaders just mentioned, which ones do you think would be considered too controversial to speak live on air?

Jesus prepares the messengers

Jesus tasks His disciples to go out with a message called the gospel. The disciples will be challenged, mocked and even mistreated for the message they are to take. Some will even be arrested, but when they are standing before the authorities, they are not to fear for the Holy Spirit will provide for them the words they are to speak (**Luke 12:12**). To have the right sermon with the right words, at the right time, gifted by the Holy Spirit is every preachers dream, or is it? Does this mean the Holy Spirit will give the person 500 words to speak, which fulfils the requirements of the secular radio stations remit for speaking live on air which has to be

True to your faith without preaching

Cover a news item and not offend anyone

Contain enough theology to maintain integrity

and remember not many of your hearers believe

Then the answer is no! When Jesus prepares His disciples to go out ahead of Him, He knew He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves. When I first read these words that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak at the right time, this brought me much comfort as a minister, until I read Acts chapter 7! It's the account of Stephen who is standing before the Sanhedrin. He speaks as the Holy Spirit inspires him. Stephen, did go over 500 words (1301 to be precise). Did Stephen speak without offending anyone, the answer is no! The cry went out, 'Stone him!' St Stephen's Day celebrated on 26th December as he was first Deacon to be martyred in the Church. What went wrong? Did he not listen to the Holy Spirit? We find the answer in what Stephen saw as he was being stoned. The heavens opened and he saw Jesus at the right hand of the throne. I can imagine Jesus saying, you will soon be with me, don't be afraid, you have been a wonderful witness to my gospel.

Is Jesus radio friendly?

Our reading today begins with Jesus saying, 'A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master' (**Matt 10:24**). The student is to emulate their teacher, they are not to be arrogant, thinking they know more than their teacher. The student is to aspire to be like the teacher, to emulate them and look up to them, to esteem them highly.

In the same way we are to emulate Jesus, never to think of ourselves more knowledgeable than Him. Who would ever think that, I hear you ask? When the church changes the message of the Gospel, giving a different priority of our calling or replace the gospel all together, we do exactly that!

The social gospel has replaced Jesus gospel in many churches in the West. The social gospel seeks to apply Christian ethics to social problems such as poverty, slums, poor nutrition and education, alcoholism, crime, and war. These things are emphasised in the preaching and teachings, while the doctrines of sin, salvation, heaven and hell, and the future kingdom of God are downplayed. Please don't misunderstand me, the Christian is called to represent Jesus within these situations and do all we can to alleviate pain and suffering of others. The love we have been shown by God should pour out of us into the lives of those around us near and far. The grace and forgiveness we have been given should be given to others as we have freely received.

The message of the gospel is clear and we as Christians have to learn how to speak the message of Jesus with clarity, never omit anything from the message and certainly not replace it for another gospel, no matter how worthy the cause looks. St. Paul gives the early church a stern warning saying, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!" (**Gal 1:8**). We do not have the authority to change the message Jesus taught, nor should we want to because it's the key to eternal life. The gospel of Jesus is eternal and the message is needed as much today as it was when Jesus preached it. Vance Haver once said, 'If the social gospel had been around at the time of the prodigal son, someone would have given him a bed and a sandwich and the son would never have returned home to the father!'

Radio friendly church

The church works hard and attempts to keep the peace with a hyper sensitive culture, which is so easily offended these days. The church it seems is careful not to say anything which may offend, avoid anything which may cause controversy and avoid division.

A new way of interpreting the scriptures is falling for Satan's oldest trick, by getting the Christian to question God's word saying, 'Did God really say that!' This new approach is called revisionism, which questions and reinterprets Scripture. Interestingly Scripture is now becoming more compatible with contemporary culture!! When we change the gospel message and revise the words of Scripture to make them fit with contemporary culture, we are attempting to make the narrow way a little wider! When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost with the gospel 3000 souls were saved and added to the church that day. By contrast out of 3000 social gospel messages and thoughts of the day episodes, how many souls have been saved?

Good Sermons

I was once asked, 'how do I know when I've preached a good sermon?' It's a good question. Think about it, for you, what constitutes a good sermon? My response raised eyebrows when I said, 'When the message is still being spoken about on Thursday'. I used to be so concerned when texts for sermons were challenging and would prompt complaints. These days, I take complaints as complements! Please don't misunderstand me, I don't deliberately go out to upset people, but consider what Jesus says next in verse 25, 'If they call the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will members of His household' (**Matt 10:25**). If we preach the same message Jesus preached surely we should be receiving some flack, even from some of those who regularly attend our services. My point being if we can speak a message or preach a sermon which pleases everyone and offends no one, then we have not spoken or preached the gospel.

Radio friendly Jesus?

If the disciples, Peter, James or John attended a church service today, would they recognise the Jesus being spoken of? The new contemporary Jesus accepts everyone without confronting sin, a Jesus who never says anything controversial or causes offence. A loving Jesus who accepts everyone unconditionally, never challenges people with the truth of the gospel. I have a sense that Peter, James and John would wonder who we are speaking about! Read the gospels again and discover a Jesus whose message offended almost everyone, from family members (**Matt 12:46-50**), friends (**Luke 10/11**). The rich, influential and the powerful (**Matt 20:25**), the Pharisees (**Matt 15:12**) and of course even His disciples. When Jesus preached for the first time in the synagogue (**Luke 4**) the people dragged Him out of the synagogue. His preaching didn't mellow, when He preached in the temple courts later in His ministry the people picked up rocks to stone Him. The Sadducees were outraged by Him, The Pharisees wanted rid of Him and the crowds sadly cried out crucify, crucify. This Jesus was far too radical for the Jews and I wonder if He is far too radical for the radio and for some of the contemporary churches?

Our new Minister!

Imagine if Jesus became our new minister! Thousands flocked to see Him and Hear Him preach each week. We wouldn't be concerned about social distancing, as even the viruses are subject to Him. We could sing without face masks, and it would be passionate, moving, stirring and powerful. Finance worries would be a thing of the past as we can even afford to assist those chapels who are struggling. How long do you think it would last?

Although Jesus was a crowd puller, He was no crowd pleaser. He would preach sermons that made some angry, the rich young ruler walked away downcast, his friends would likely leave with him. It wouldn't be long before the complaints started coming from His sermons. The numbers attending services reduce each week, as the commitments to Jesus are just too challenging for most. Protesters would soon be gathering outside the chapel to ban Him for not being loving! Undoubtedly Jesus was bold, courageous, fearless, loving, steadfast, uncompromising and utterly committed to His disciples and doing the will of the Father. Living His life without sin, without compromise, devoted to His Father's will, teaching all that the Father tells Him and yes many were offended by His message but many souls were also saved for an eternity.

We are not above our teacher. We may well know more about our world, the environment our bodies today through science, biology, physiology etc but nothing is a surprise to God. We cannot say we know more today than Jesus did, so it's ok to change the message! Have you ever wondered how many hairs you have on your head as you read this? Whats your best guess? On average (depending on the person) there are about 100,000 hairs on your head! There is one who knows the exact number right now! Lets us not be arrogant in thinking we need to change the message of the gospel, to do more good works and less preaching and teaching, because people don't want to hear the message Jesus preached today. Saying people today want to see love in action and this is how we witness! Remember I am not objecting to love in action, this is right and good to do, however it cannot replace Jesus message to repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is near. Jesus' message is the same yesterday, today and forever more.

Sending out

Jesus sends forth His followers knowing we will be mistreated and laughed at, for we will be like sheep among wolves but we are not to fear for Jesus has not left His flock to face the wolves without the Shepherd. The Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak when we find ourselves speaking to others about our faith and we have a message of good news to give. Jesus message is indeed great news so, 'Do not fear'.

God knows even when a sparrow falls to the ground, nothing escapes His attention, how much more important are we to the Father than many sparrows. In our passage today, Jesus repeats the same phrase, 'Do not be afraid' 3 times. This is significant, we can trust God because Jesus has told us not once, not twice but three times in 12 verses, 'Do not be afraid'.

Let the scoffers laugh

One of the greatest fears we have in sharing our faith is, what others will think about us. We can be afraid others will laugh at us. The disciples are encouraged to get their perspective right, don't fear those who will laugh and scoff, no one will be laughing when they meet Jesus for He says, 'Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown before my Father in heaven' (**Matt 10:32-33**). Imagine being too embarrassed to speak about Jesus in this world, in case they laugh at us and then standing before the throne of God and Jesus asks us, were you really too embarrassed to speak about me to others, would we be laughed out of heaven? This is the title of my sermon today, don't be laughed out of heaven. For its better to be a fool for Christ in this world and received in heaven, than to be accepted in this world and be laughing stock in hell.

So if we hear anyone say we should never preach the gospel of Jesus because it divides and we can all get along as long if we just love each other, are we sacrificing truth on the alter of peace? We may all learn to speak one language, work together in harmony for the common good, syncretise all the religions so they meld into one and never call Jesus Lord, never say He is the Way, (as this is offensive and controversial to every other religion). The book Ecclesiastes reminds us there is nothing new under the sun (**Ecc 1:9**). We have actually had this utopian society in this world once before. The world was united under one language, one philosophical belief system, a humanistic set of principles, ruled with a one world government and men marvelled at their achievements. They even built a tower to reach up to the heavens to show their power and unity and this place had a name and it was called Babel. God was not pleased! (**Gen 11:9**).

Summary

Jesus says we are blessed when people speak all kinds of evil against us or persecute us for our faith (**Matt 5**). We need to learn being laughed at in this world is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Getting laughed out of heaven would be much worse!! It is better to be considered a fool for Christ in heaven, than a fool in hell. Pray for your preachers that they may always hold to the word of God, speak and preach without compromise, never change the message to simply please others. We cant just preach what is popular and avoid the difficult and challenging doctrines because they are deemed too controversial. The church of Jesus Christ is built on the rock of the gospel preached, not homilies and thought of the day! I know this message would never be heard on the radio (its 2000 words too long!!) Remember the church is not called to be popular or fixing the words problems, we are called to do as the disciples first did, seek and speak to the lost sheep around us today and give them the saving message of the Gospel of Christ. Let us commit ourselves again that we will not neglect to show love to others, we will not neglect to show love to others by sharing the love of God. We will not neglect to show love to others by sharing the of Jesus. As a church let us learn to speak and share the Good News message Jesus taught us. We can be loving and give away all we have to the poor, but if we fail to share the gospel of Christ the soul is still lost in the world. We have a message of reconciliation back to God, through repentance and faith and be born again, have a fresh start, a new beginning as we set our feet on a new path, a new walk and God walks with us. **Amen**