

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Matthew 7:15-23 (NT page 972)

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MSP 456 peace

Make me a channel of Your

Reflection

In order to understand our passage, it is important to recognise its setting within the whole chapter.

The chapter deals with being true/saved or being false/lost and is described by ways of 4 scenes.

Verses 13 & 14 deals with the two ways, the saved and the lost and the two ways leading respectively to life or destruction. Verses 15–20 deals with being false or true disciples of Jesus Christ. Verses 21–23 deals with genuine discipleship and those faking it. Verses 24–27 deals with the consequences of being true/wise and false/foolish Christians.

Our chapter deals with practical discipleship. True discipleship is a minority position, a matter of deliberately opting out from the mainstream, but it is a matter of life and death. *False prophets* present themselves as insiders (*in sheep's clothing*), but their intention is destructive (*ferocious wolves*). Not all alleged "prophecy" is to be taken at face value; it must be tested. And the test is not the prophets' profession but *their fruit*. The false prophets of v 15 were deceivers, but these are self-deceived. Our reading urges us to consider not just what we profess or believe in, but whether it is based on a genuine relationship with Jesus and showing it in practical ways.

The real test of discipleship lies in the deeds that usually accompanies and confirms faith. Our reading is about being practical with our faith.

On the 31st of October 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the All Saints church in Wittenberg, protesting against the pope asking money for the forgiveness of peoples sins. He exposed the pope who only wanted the poor people's money to build a new basilica of St Peter's in Rome. And in the end his action, lead to the Reformation all over the world. He stated that it is only through the mercy of God that sinners are saved by faith alone. He put his faith of the supremacy of God into practice - by denying anyone who believed otherwise.

It is then that the words of Jesus gets new meaning "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Even when they fake prophecies and miracles – He will still send them away because they do not have a living relationship with him.

Faith does not fall out of the air. Faith is born out of the relationship God has with us. It is when we come face to face with God in the ordinary events of life that we experience faith. It is only when we feel desperately alone, or ill or bereaved that we realise it is only God who can help us. It is in these moments that we feel His hand guiding us and His arms surrounding us with love and compassion. Believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only way we can make sense of death. Believing in God's Holy Spirit is the only way we can cope with everyday living. Believing in God our Father is the only way we can look with hope into our future.

Faith also is always accompanied by deeds of thanksgiving or fruits like in our reading. A follower of Jesus will be like a fruit tree bearing fruit in season for others to see.

There are many examples of people who showed their faith and led others to believe too.

I for one will not forget one communion in my old church in South Africa. In my Parish there was what we would call a “working farm” whereby people with disabilities could stay and work, earning money to be self sufficient. Every now and then a group from Clunyfarm would join us for worship. Some could not even read or write.

The Reformed church had very strict rules when it came to communion. Only those who confirmed their faith in front of a whole congregation, could take part in the Lord’s meal. And the communion is also different in the sense that everyone sits in turn at the Lord’s table. But one Communion Sunday, they turned up. I did not know how the congregation is going to react when they also want to sit at the Lord’s table, being mindful of the fact that my previous congregation did not allow woman wearing trousers to the table of the Lord.

So when I announced that the table is ready and people can come to the table, the whole group from Cluny farm stood up and came forward. I was waiting for the reaction of some session members! But then something I never envisaged happened. Members of the congregation got up from their pews and started helping some of them who struggled to walk. And then when the bread and the cup were passed again people helped them. And then as we sang a hymn at the table, although they could not read one single line they made up their own sounds of joy! I can tell you one thing, there was not a dry eye in that church that morning.

The true meaning of communion was made clear to me on that morning. I saw the love of Christ in action. Jesus Christ came to serve and not to be served. He expects you and me to serve Him and others with our gifts and talents. He wants us to bear fruit so that others too can be saved. And the practical things of being a follower of Jesus do not have to be hard or difficult or extraordinary. It is often through the plain things in life that we become witnesses of our faith in the lord Jesus. It can be a smile, or a wee note of inspiration to someone else, it can be a kind gesture or a helping hand or a listening ear or a sensitive eye or a willing hand ...

May this communion be the one you will always remember as THE one where your faith became something practical – eating and drinking with others – associating yourself with the pain, struggle and bereavement of a brother or a sister in need!

Amen