

Lent Reflection - Thursday, March 25th (Andrea Ward)

John 8:31-42 (Daniel 3:14-28)

Today's bible reading is John 8:31-42:

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' ³³They answered him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?'

³⁴Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.'

³⁹'Abraham is our father,' they answered. 'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would^q do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹You are doing the works of your own father.'

'We are not illegitimate children,' they protested. 'The only Father we have is God himself.' ⁴²Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.'

Reflection

"Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free".

"What is truth?" Pilate would ask Jesus at his trial. What is *your* truth isn't necessarily *my* truth we hear people saying today. Truth is no longer something concrete and factual, but liquid, changeable, true for one person and not for another.

In today's passage, Jesus presents the Pharisees, the Jews and all people with a challenge: believe in and hold to what I teach, and then you will know *the* truth, and the truth will set you free. Jesus is plain and unequivocal - if you want to be free, then believe in me and believe my words!

The Pharisees and many of the Jews had been challenging Jesus about his identity, his authority, where he was from, and now even those who seemed to believe him hit a road block. And that road block centred around their status as children of God and their freedom.

Since when, they protested, had they ever been slaves to anyone? Well, of course, they knew that they had been physical slaves under the Egyptians, but as far as they were concerned, as Abraham's descendants, descendants of the one chosen by God and therefore God's chosen people, they believed themselves to be slaves to no one. "How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Someone once said that "Man's greatest need ...is to know what is his greatest need".

The Jews of Jesus's day didn't seem to be aware that they were in need, in any way, spiritually. They were physically descended from Abraham and so everything was just fine. They were relying on

external things - ancestry, the nation's history and its privilege of being chosen by God, and (for the Pharisees especially) observing the many laws, regulations and rites that made them feel secure. They were blind to the truth of their real need and therefore blind to the truth of the one who had come to deal with their need.

What was their need? The same need that all humans share: the problem of sin. "I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" Jesus said. Jesus was talking about humanity's condition - the shackles of self-centred rather than God-centred living, the sin which we all share in with Adam and Eve, and which cuts us off from God. This was and is the first essential point that we all need to understand about ourselves: that we have a big problem, and it's the problem of sin.

The second thing that we need to understand is that we can't do anything about our problem by ourselves - we can't free ourselves from our slavery, but need the help of another. Jesus goes on, "Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." A slave, even in the best situation in Jesus's day, was only ever that: a slave, who had no permanent or secure place within a family. His or her status was insecure and had no rights, privileges or future inheritance. A son, on the other hand, had all the status and security of being a family member.

Jesus uses the picture to help us understand that as the Son of his Father in heaven, he has a permanent place in his Father's family - and as *the Son*, he is the one who has the power to set us free from our situation of being slaves to sin: he alone has the power to liberate us and give us the same privileged status as sons and daughters as himself in his Father's family: free to enjoy permanent positions in God's family, secure in our future inheritance - belonging to God's family for ever, for eternity.

Recognising that we are helpless and we need someone else to help us is not a pill we find easy to swallow. Even in our day to day lives our natural pride makes it hard for us to accept our need of others.

But when we accept our total need of the Son, Jesus, when we believe that his word is the truth, that He *is* the way, the life and *the truth*, and when we hold to his teaching - what we discover is that the truth does indeed set us free from slavery to sin, from the chains that constantly bring us back to focusing on ourselves, and to discover the love in which God beholds us as his sons and daughters, his children.

"Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free".