

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 36 God is love let heaven adore him (A hymn for troubled days.)

Reading: Mark 12.38-44

Prayers: Beryl, Derry, Audrey, Mrs. Wilkinson (Branksome), Mrs. Topping, Peter and Anne Marie (mother v. ill); Evelyn, Marion, Gerry, Andrew, Elizabeth, Judith, Joyce, Jean, Cynthia

Last week we heard Jesus speak about that twin law

which is at the heart of what God desires of us:

“Love of God and love of neighbour”.

We heard Jesus’ approving words to the scribe

with whom he had a conversation about the basis of all religious law.

Today we’ve heard what sounds like a blanket condemnation of the scribes but was originally a comment on the behaviour of some of them.

Some of the scribes enjoyed their status!

They wore a particularly long, ostentatious version of the “talith”, an outer shawl worn when at prayer or on religious duties.

They expected their status as scholars to be acknowledged and to be given preferential treatment wherever they went!

Wearers of dog collars beware!

Yet, this was just foolishness compared

with the far greater failure to which Jesus now refers.

As educated men they were often entrusted

with the financial affairs of those who have died.

They are responsible for the wellbeing of the widows and their children who are left behind.

The accusation is that they gobble up much of the estate

for their own benefit and deprive the widows of the money they need.

What Jesus describes are people who are “religious”

not out of a great love of God and their fellows

but in order to satisfy their own egos.

They want a sense of self importance

and to acquire the status wealth often provides.

Yet, there are those who live by different values.

Jesus sees a poor woman come into the Temple.

She places two tiny coins into the treasury,

the equivalent of one fiftieth of a day labourers wage.

It is all she has.

She gives her all out of her devotion to God.....

In my life it has often seemed

that those who have least are often those who are most generous.

Those who know their dependence on God
have the surest trust in the love and goodness of God.
I am often ashamed
at how much I hold back in comparison with them!

Yet, our reading today is not just about personal morality.
We read it against the backdrop of the failure
of some of the great financial institutions in our world.
They are institutions which have often lost all sense of morality.
Their only God has become the God of wealth.
They have lent money only with the aim of becoming still richer.
They have not asked questions about the wisdom or rightness
of what they were doing.
Most of the rest of us, have just sat back
and done little to question whether they were acting rightly
or whether they were flouting the will of God.
We accepted the six billion bonus dollars
paid to Lehman Brother employees last year
and the similar bonus's to those working in the City of London.
Were we not all becoming rich on their backs?
Didn't we just accept it as our house prices rose
as more and more people beggared themselves
by accepting cheap money with which to pay
vast sums for their homes?

We see now it was all an illusion!
Where we lose touch with love for God and love for each other
it may seem for a time that everything is wonderful.
But there is a mechanism built into this world
which results in failure and suffering
when we ignore God's law of love.....
That's what we're seeing at the moment.
It will effect bankers, politicians, you and me
and, probably, most of all it will cause greatest suffering
amongst those who are already poor in our world.

Yet, it also provides us with an opportunity for repentance,
our failure as individuals and as a society
to love God and love our neighbour as we ought.
It also provides us with a time to ask about the kind of world
we believe God wants to see
and the kind of institutions which will make such a world possible.

Thank God for those faithful people who strive to reveal to the world
what love of God and love of others means in practice
and who enrich the world through their lives.
Bu the grace of God at work in our lives
may we be counted amongst them. Amen.