

Hello everyone,

Attitude

It's an odd word, isn't it. It sounds like someone's chewed your hat

Attitude

It's a word that shapes how we live our lives in the small details of life

How we arrange our socks or fill the dish washer,

But it also applies to how we approach the bigger areas of life.

Attitude.

It's a short hand for how we treat each other, not just our hats but all we do and how we live. How we shape our climate and our environment and our history.

But when it comes to attitudes, there is a balance to be struck.

Luke in the story today presents us with one temple and two people and asks us to reflect on the attitudes we find around us.

Both people are welcome in the temple, they are both ritually clean. Neither has been asked to leave the temple but we will see that the story turns on a number of attitudes. There's the people in the story, then Jesus reasons for telling it. How Luke feels it should be written down and how we react to the story in our very different lives.

Both people in the temple are praying and usually we hear people deride the Pharisee efforts at prayer as too proud and held the tax collector up as the example to follow.

Have you ever wondered? Most of Jesus stories have more than one way of understanding them. So is this a parable? Is there another way to choose to understand it?

Here in this chapter of his gospel Luke has gathered a collection of Jesus stories about prayer. They link together a little bit like successive parts of a question in a school text book.

First Jesus tells the disciples about a marginalised widow and judge. You need to keep praying like

the widow and don't lose heart. Good advice we echo.

Then Jesus gives two demonstration of prayer. One by a pharisee the other a tax collector. He asks us to comment and maybe to judge.

But we often miss that Jesus widens the audience for this story. This is not just for disciples. Now he addresses those who trusted in themselves and regarded others with contempt.

It's about prayer and attitudes and Luke leads us down a particular way with his introduction

Both men are praying.

Both prayers are about how our attitudes affects others around us.

Like all stories it makes us think. This story actually shares ideas with the Good Samaritan, the neighbour who comes in need at midnight and the unjust manager.

This is once more about one of Luke's big themes Love you neighbour.

Help out, but remember

How you help out affects others

How you do something affects others

And God sees it all.

Life is all about relationships and our attitudes that build relationships.

The Pharisee was standing by himself. That's the simplest way to see what Luke writes. By himself, not surrounded by others. Standing by himself he prays to God.

It is a personal prayer and it starts as a typical thanksgiving prayer. He gives thanks that he is not like other people including thieves and tax collectors. What are we to make of that?

The choice is between condemning him for self righteousness or believing he is not being hypocritical- he really is just thankful.

It is a variant on 'there but for the grace of God , I go.' After all Jesus offers prayers that distinguish among people. I thank you father he prays at one

point because you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to the children.

Some say the pharisee is not a figure to despise, he is a figure to amuse us to help Jesus make a point.

Maybe the pharisees judgemental attitude towards the tax collector is because he doesn't know him properly.

He doesn't know what the tax collector thinks and feels. A conversation might have changed his attitude, who knows.

But over there the tax collector also stands by himself. He has nothing to celebrate. He has no reason to be thankful.

That makes us stop and think too, doesn't it?

How does that attitude fit into our modern world?

Beating his breast is a sign of grief and atonement.

But what are we to make of this attitude?

Is it respect?

He hangs his head and seems so nervous.

Yet we talk of a loving forgiving God.

The tax collector's prayer is that God's divine anger be turned away from him.

Be merciful to me.

He doesn't rush in with a list of excuses. He recognised he has done wrong and asks for mercy. But there seems to be no interest in changing his job or getting to know the people he has wronged.

The story makes us think. And one thought has to be what about us?

Where are we in the story.

Sometimes our attitude is like the Pharisee, sometimes like the tax collector.

Then we get to the ending of the story over which there hangs a great scholarly debate.

Are these final words from Jesus or did Luke add them?

Jesus says this man went down to his house justified. Fine

And it continues rather than that man.

But some believe that Luke added the next bit about all who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Apparently, the Greek can mean he went home justified alongside that one. What a difference a word can make to relationships in this our story.

Attitudes can reshape the story.

It's true for us too

Every day.

We can't know what is in someone's heart, but we can know our own attitudes and choose to live alongside people accordingly.

What a difference a word can make to relationships in our lives too.

Even when we can't meet, our attitudes matter.

But they will be especially important in the coming months as we journey back together to normal times.

Peace be with you.

Amen.