

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 2 July 2017

No pleasing

Pray Thank God for the variety of ways in which he makes his will known, the wide range of gifts and people he uses to advance his purposes and that there isn't ONE right way to share in his plans. Pray that we would have more humility about positions yet continue to have boldness to engage with others in furthering God's work.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 11:16-19.

Background People were drawing stark contrasts between John the Baptist and Jesus. John styled himself after an Old Testament prophet such as Elijah. He dressed unusually in sackcloth, his lifestyle was very simple and quite austere while Jesus, far from being a socialite, did spend time with "outcasts" namely tax collectors and was known to be at parties and celebrations. Jesus uses the illustration of children not seeing eye to eye on what games they might play to make the point that there was no pleasing some people. He didn't set himself up against John but he did suggest that God's wisdom would be shown in its results.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Children can be funny – one minute they are the best of friends, the next they fall out big time and at times over nothing at all. Yet, they can be very quick to make up. Adults fall out too, but we aren't as good at making up. To what extent was Jesus "saying" that there was a place for both John and his own styles of living? "There is no pleasing some people" – how does that apply to matters of faith a) within the church? b) from outwith it? Was Jesus saying anything goes? If not, what then?
2. Our faith can be very very dear to us and we can feel threatened when aspects of it are called into question. Why is that? Can you give examples where this has happened to you? How do we cope? How do we deal with others who sense that our approach undermines some aspect of faith or practice that is very dear to them? Does that mean that we shouldn't change things? How can the way we go about implementing change hinder/advance things?
3. "Just because you say that something is God's will doesn't mean that it is". How do we determine or even sense that something is God's will? What factors come into play? Is there a difference when it comes to deciding where it is someone else's plans that are being considered to when it is ours? How do we move away from always being forced to decide that "this" is right and "that" is wrong? What does Jesus mean by God's wisdom will be known by the results? Surely it is more than "it will all come out in the wash". Comments?
4. Both John and Jesus attracted considerable followings. John was on the fringe of society out in the desert adopting a lifestyle that was unusual for his time and he spoke frankly and challenged people to respond (repent). Arguably, Jesus was on the fringe of the religious community too but he prioritised those who were shunned and rejected by mainstream society. He wasn't averse to eating a proper meal or having wine. He certainly wasn't constrained by artificial rules and regulations but he too spoke frankly and could be just as challenging. How can we see God in both these approaches? How willing are we to ring the changes and use different methods to reach out to people with the one gospel? Where do our strengths lie a) personally b) collectively as a congregation? What lessons/approaches might we learn from others?
5. Anything else that arises from the passage or the service?

Prayer Lord, help us to be open to your leading in the way that we worship and in the way we reach out to others in word and action, in love and service. Help us to be open to different styles and methods, to be less critical of those who differ from us and above all open to your leading. Bless the Summer Mission and all that follows. For Jesus' sake Amen