

Sermon by Jane Brough – Philippians 2: 1-13 and Matthew 21:23-32

“Lest we forget”. This inscription is found on most village war memorials, erected to remember the village’s sons and fathers who died in the First World War, “the War to end all wars”, as it was famously called. But yet more were to die in the Second World War and in subsequent wars around the world still. Memorials call is to remember people lost, tragedies endured, challenges faced, “lest we forget”.



Modern daily lives of celebration and sadness, deadlines and multitasking, cause us generally to deal with life as it comes, live “in the moment”. Memory fails us, we don’t keep promises, we don’t learn from the past and we don’t keep on track, unless somehow we are reminded. We also don’t consider the future often enough – the world we are leaving to the next generation, shaping their attitudes and possibilities – until something or someone brings us up short, teaches us something new. But there is hope for the future in remembering where we’ve come from, what has happened, if, in the remembering, we choose something different.



Three Sundays back presenter David Attenborough hosted the TV programme “Extinction – the Facts”, with expert contributors explaining individual crises that form a terrifying whole. We are told that rampant consumption has got us to where we are now. The Rainforests are being lost, three million hectares each year are cleared for planting soy, coffee, palm oil and grazing beef. All of which we use in this country.



As we humans convert more habitats more diseases become a problem, driving pandemics which originate in the animals losing their native homes. As we change the biodiversity of the planet changes. That’s our human problem. Deforestation, poaching, pollution, overfishing, climate change have left us in a dire emergency.



Of the eight million species of plants, animals and insects on Earth, one million are at risk of extinction. We have wasted 20 to 30 years not doing enough. But if nature’s given the chance we were told it would bounce back. We can, we must safeguard our planet’s biodiversity. If we can all remember that this wonderful world was give to us to care for, there is hope for the future. If we can all do our bit to help, there is hope. If we choose to do something different from non there is hope for a future. Thank goodness David Attenborough keeps reminding us.

In our Gospel reading we have Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, in the days before the cross, he follows a provocative and symbolic action with teaching in the colonnades around the Court of the Gentiles, from which he had just overturned the tables of the moneychangers and expelled the traders. Jesus knows the time is now short and he needs people to think again about their attitude towards him.

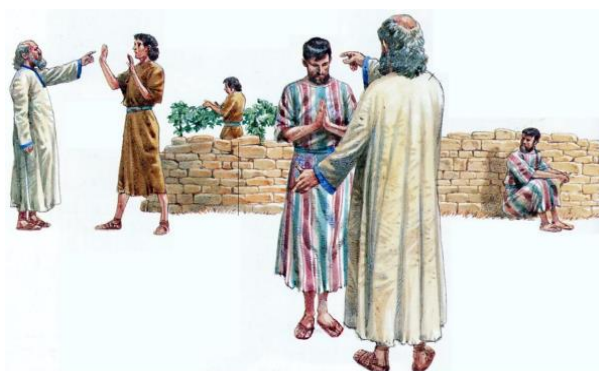




In today's passage his questions are directed at the chief priests and elders of the people. These were among the official leaders of the Jewish nation, the guardians of the religious and moral conscience. As some of the power groups in Judaism, they might frequently not see eye to eye, but in different ways, they were all being drawn into active opposition to Jesus. These leaders are on a collision course with the nation's Messiah.

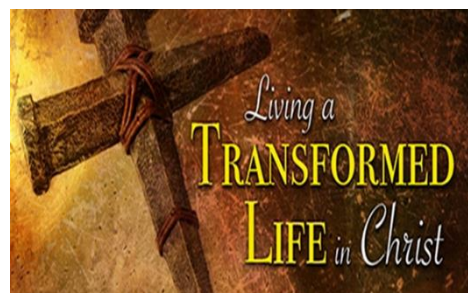
The passage opens with a question about the authority of Jesus, which was attracting attention and causing a disturbance. Jesus' response about the authority of John the Baptist threw his questioners and they had to discuss among themselves before they could respond – they knew that if they said that John was led by God from heaven, Jesus could ask them why they hadn't then learnt from him. If they criticised John, they'd lose some popular support. They couldn't win this diplomatic dilemma and the opportunity to challenge Jesus' authority publicly was lost. Jesus didn't respond to their question, at least not in the way they might have wanted.

Instead, Jesus responds with the story of two sons, one is a rebel who eventually goes to work on the farm, the other says the right thing, but does the opposite. Such a story highlights the fact that people can change, can choose to respond differently, can act in new ways. It wasn't the religious people who responded to John, but those on the margins who chose new life. They recognised and welcomed God's saving action in John's ministry and longed for God's Kingdom.



For Jesus to remind people of John was to link himself to the same message and authority. Both believed and spoke of something new that was happening, something so new that others urgently need to put their lives in order. Jesus hoped that by remembering John, perhaps people would be more open to hearing Jesus. Jesus' parable was to share some space to rethink, to reassess and chose to change their minds. Changed minds would be a step towards transformed lives.

A changed mind holds the seed of hope for a transformed world. When we choose lives of peace and justice, reconciliation and the common good, we necessarily examine, change and choose to order our lives, our politics and economics, education and religion, to reflect that choice. It is, in fact, also choosing to give up some past habits that no longer reflect what we now know and believe. We choose to remember so that we can change.



The journey of choosing to change and believe, seeking transformation, is shared at the gatherings of those on the same journey. It is what we call church. Being church together is sharing that journey, a journey in the direction of God's Kingdom. Our shared sacraments draw us to the life of remembering the one whose authority Jesus shared, to Jesus' calling to be whole and to the faith we live together. In sharing, we are strengthened, encouraged and transformed with our world.