

2018-10-21 ... 6.30pm Evensong ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

Matthew 12: 1 – 21

**'Arguments and Mercy'**

**Introduction:**

Matthew 12 is not for the faint-hearted – or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Matthew 12 does not sit well with a view of Christian discipleship as calm, quiet, without controversy.

In our reading tonight – the first 21 verses – we heard arguments about plucking and eating heads of grain and about healing, on the Sabbath. Then in **verse 14** came the foreshadowing of the cross:

**'The Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.'**

If you read further in the chapter, there are more arguments:

Jesus is accused of siding with the devil ...

He is challenged to give a 'sign' and refuses ...

And he says those words about his family being those who do the Father's will rather than simply being blood relatives ...

A chapter of arguments ...

A chapter of controversy ...

**Jesus' Challenge:**

It's clear that Jesus felt he could not back down in the face of challenge but had to meet it and overcome it.

That may have something to say to each one of us ... and to us as a church when the going gets tough ... there are occasions when we should not back down.

**Two Core things:**

And it seems to me that Jesus gives us 2 core principles ... principles that are important enough to stick to ... even when they provoke argument or controversy.

Both come in the first 7 verses ... the '*Cornfield Incident*' ...

I wonder how any of us might have answered ... walking along through the cornfields on the Sabbath ... and taking the edge off our hunger with handfuls, or fingerfuls ... of grain?

We might have argued that it wasn't really work ... didn't take much effort ... we might have turned defensive in another way and reminded our accusers that we weren't stealing – according to Deuteronomy 23, Jews were permitted to pluck a few ears of grain from a neighbour's field.

Jesus doesn't take either of those routes. Instead, he makes claims about himself and his mission – using Old Testament examples.

He reminds them how King David had broken the law of the Pharisees – and he, Jesus, is more important than David.

He reminds them that priests are allowed to work in the Temple and he – Jesus – is more important than the Temple.

**PTO**

So the first principle that can guide us ... do we continue to argue, to stick to our guns is this:

**Whose attitude acknowledges the importance, the priority of Jesus and his mission?**

The second principle comes when Jesus quotes from Hosea 6 verse 6:

**'God says: I desire mercy, not sacrifice'**

What we give to God in obedience

in time ...

in money ...

in dedication ...

in life style ...

is on the 'sacrifice' side of this ... but it is only Christ-like if it results in **mercy** ... in us showing mercy.

This links to St Paul's teaching in **1 Corinthians 13**. And in **Matthew 12** Jesus goes on to put this principle into action: not the sacrifice of keeping rigidly to a rule book ... but mercy in the healing of the man with the withered hand.

**Conclusion:**

After this, Matthew emphasises again ... really rams the point home by quoting from Isaiah – that the **'Servant of the Lord will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick.'**

That is not what mercy does ...

So to recap for us: controversy and arguments can come our way as we follow Jesus ... and sometimes – we need to remain strong and keep challenging – some of our guidance about when to do this is when we're as sure as we can be that we're arguing for the importance, the priority of Jesus and his mission ... and core to that is the showing of mercy.

Amen.