

At various times I have spoken of the system of readings we use in Church each Sunday, the Revised Common Lectionary, a system we share with Christians of a wide range of traditions. I have spoken of its advantages, emphasising a unity of worship and reflection right across barriers of language, of culture, of tradition.

But there is a downside, on some occasions I will open up the passages for a particular Sunday and say inwardly to myself, ‘O Lord, I really wish you had not said that.’ It does mean though that the preacher has to tackle and think through passages that, left to his own devices, he gently pass over.

Such a passage is our Gospel passage for today. You could almost imagine the 1st century tabloid newspaper headline ‘Renegade preacher tells kids to defy parents!’ ‘O dear Lord. I wish you had n’t said that.’ But it is there. Do we just put our fingers over that bit and wish it wasn’t there or do we try to get a handle on what this has to say to us in our own generation? First of all we have to recognise that different idiom, different literary styles that suit one culture can jar on another. I recall in the late 60’s English papers making fun of the Chinese people saying ‘May Chairman Mao live for 10,000 years.’ When I asked a Chinese friend about this he said; ‘Don’t be stupid. No-one thinks Chairman Mao is going to live for 10, 000 years – it is just the Chinese way of saying ‘Long live Chairman Mao.’’

So let us step back from the passage and look at it as a whole. It is about loyalty, a radical loyalty to Jesus that underlines and informs our other loyalties to family and to friends and community.

Let’s take this a stage further. A radical loyalty to Jesus that informs and underlines our other loyalties. When I begin to look at it this way Jesus

becomes less of an adversary who demands to be appeased rather a companion along the way, a demanding companion, a companion who expects high things of us but a companion none the less. To help us reflect on this let us just listen to this presentation of the Lord's Prayer some of you may have heard before.

Drama Script – Lord's Prayer

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us of this fundamental truth:

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need *Heb 4:15*

The Jesus who asks of us an uncompromising loyalty, a loyalty that informs and underlines all our other commitments, is the same Jesus who travels the road with us; who, who knew the pain and the loneliness of Gethsemene and Calvary, who met frightened disciples on the Road to Emmaus, listened to their pain and confusion and making himself known in the breaking of bread sent them back to tell the good news. It is the same Jesus who came to Simon Peter by the Lake, lifting from him the pain of his memory of denial and commissioned him afresh to service, 'Feed my sheep'.

This same Jesus comes to us in our strengths and our weaknesses, our faithfulness and our failure, in all the complexities of our relationships in work, in business, in the home and community and calls us to further service in his name.

So let us indeed 'approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'