

Ps 63:1-8 & Mt. 5: 21-26. St G. 9.30. 24.3.19

Our theme this morning is **“Letting things go that do not bear fruit”**.

This has a familiar Lenten ring - so when we look at our waist line and try and keep off chocolate for Lent. We were looking after two of our grand children for the week end recently. One said ‘I have given up sweets but not chocolate’. This is called the cautious approach!

I want to look at our title from two approaches ... the first is Practical the second is Spiritual.

1) The PRACTICAL: De-cluttering has been much in the news recently. The Japanese cleaning-up guru, Maria Konda, is in vogue. She is strong advocate of tidying up and clearing out what is not wanted. We have all been in homes that would probably give her a heart attack! Is yours one?

I think in all of this we need a balance – it is good to have things around us that bring back memories ... perhaps of a person, a place or a particular happening. Then there are things we use to remind us of our Father God – a cross, candle, icon, flower. But there is usually a lot of stuff we never look at, need or use.

Advertisements encourage us to keep up with the fashion with a rapid turn-over of clothes and things. It is good for retailers but bad for our bank balance, the planet’s resources ... and it may well be made with cheap labor. We live in a throw-away society.

When Jesus sends out his 12 disciples, he tells them to live simply and without excess (Mk 6: 7-9). This advice is as relevant today as it was then.

Before Marion and I moved Salisbury, we were strong supporters of Blandford Charity Shops and particularly the Corporation Dump. When the many trips were completed, there was a wonderful feeling of liberation – Yes, we had de-cluttered to a degree ... now we need to have another go! If you are squirrel, and most of are, our homes become filled with unnecessary stuff ... rather like many lady’s hand-bags. Jesus tells his disciples not to take two cloaks – one is quite adequate. The danger is that we become very possession centred and Jesus reminds us “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” (Mt 6:19-21)

Our true joy and peace comes not from possessions, “God is most glorified in us when we are satisfied in Him. On the other hand, when we are satisfied by created things, rather than the Creator, we risk making them idols”. (John Piper)

Letting go of practical things that do not bear fruit is one area but then there is the SPIRITUAL. This is perhaps more difficult, it involves looking at attitudes that do not bear fruit. Earlier in the week, the Lenten Diocesan booklet ‘Praying together’ asked the question, “What do I have to leave behind to faithfully follow Jesus?” It a question we should all be asking ourselves with honesty and integrity.

I want to look at one of the 7 Vices, letting go of anger. Martin Luther King said, "To be free we have to let go of anger and hatred."

There have been some programs recently where Holocaust victims have felt able to share their thoughts. What I found particularly moving is that they do not look back ... they look forward. They are not filled with anger, resentment, hatred and revenge. They appear to possess a special peace and love for life – as they look ahead with a longing to build a better future. If we think of the Israelites in the OT when they escaped from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh – they did not seek revenge, they look forward to building a new life in the Promised Land.

So when we are hurt, let down, treated badly... What do we do? Do we allow the pain to control us and consume us? For a moment imagine we are the father of a prodigal son wanting to return home. As his father and filled with anger at what the boy had done by rejecting you – probably, you would have slammed the front door in his face when you saw him coming up the road. Or do we look at the situation another way ... may be even admit our responsibility and part in it...then as father we are running down the road to meet our son.

When I have been hurt and angered by someone, I always feel that I am getting somewhere when I feel I can start praying positively for the situation or the other person – and feel God's love flowing between us. That is an Alleluia moment. We need to remember that it takes two to tango.

Paul says in Romans, if vengeance belongs to God, then it does not belong to us. Penitence requires an internal response rather than blaming the other. Our Gospel reading makes this clear. Hatred does not cease by compounding further hatred. Hatred is only overcome by love. If hatred and anger are not arrested, it does more harm to the one who hates than the one who is hated. (Just as power, in the end, so often buries those who wield it)

I want to end with an old Wisdom story. (Told by Kate Compston). It encourages letting go of all that hinders our fulfillment.

Three people were searching for the 'Water of Life' hoping to drink from it and live forever.

The first was a warrior: he reckoned the water of life would be very forceful – a mighty torrent or rapid – so he went in full armour, with his weapons, believing he could force the water to yield to him.

The second was an enchantress: she reckoned the water of life would be very magical – perhaps a whirlpool or a geyser, something she could manipulate with spells. So she went in her long star-spangled robe, hoping to outwit the water.

The third was a trader: he reckoned the water of life would be very costly – a fountain of pearl-drop and diamonds – so he loaded his clothes and purses with money, hoping to be able to buy the water.

When the travellers reached their destination, they found they had all been quite wrong about the water of life.

It wasn't a torrent to be intimidated by force.

It wasn't a whirlpool to be charmed by spells.

It wasn't a fountain of pearl-drops or diamond to be bought.

It was just a tiny, sparkling spring; its benefits were absolutely free – but, of course, you had to kneel to drink it.

This caused the seekers great consternation.

The warrior was in full armor and couldn't bend.

The enchantress had on her long magic robe and if it became soiled it would lose its power.

The trader was so loaded with money that is he did no more than incline his head, coins would start falling out.

All dressed up, the three could not get down and or lower themselves to drink from the spring of the water of life.

There was only one solution.

So the warrior laid aside his armor.

The enchantress laid aside her magic robe.

The trader laid aside his clothes he had stuffed with money.

Then each of them – naked – could kneel to drink from the water of life and receive its sweet, cool, startling benefits.

PAUSE.

To make our journey with God more fruitful, what do we each need to give up?

PAUSE/ Amen.