

Sermon for Mattins
Sunday 30th September 2018

**May I speak in the name of God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

The cohort of new students arrived
At Chichester University
Last weekend
Depending where you live
You may have seen them
Or at least
Heard them

Meeting lots of new students
reminds me of being a new student
Of leaving home
Going to stay in halls
And being homesick
I am one of those people
Who always get homesick

being surrounded by people
Facing this kind of transition
for the first time
has made me reflect
On what makes us feel at home

And it is often little things
Familiar people
Familiar places
Our own seat at the table

the familiar makes us feel safe

I suspect it was the same
For the Jewish leaders
The Pharisees and Lawyers
Whose behaviour
Is quite similar to ours

The Pharisees and lawyers
In today's reading
Are religious leaders
In a land that is occupied
By oppressive conquerors

If Jesus accusations
against them are accurate
these religious leaders
are finding their security
not in the God
they worship and serve
but in the minutiae of the Law

they have shifted
their focus
from what they know of God
through their scriptures
which describe their salvation history
and their Lord's call for justice and mercy

they have forgotten
the message of the Exodus
God's direct intervention
in human history
forgotten the return of the exiles
and the God working
through human agency in King Cyrus

they have forgotten
God's promises to them
and God's expectations of them

in response
Jesus accuses them of being
Leaders who are preoccupied
with status and glory
taking the best seats in the synagogue
and demanding the respect of the people

yet forgetting
that leadership involves service

Jesus is angry with these leaders
And Insults the Pharisee
In front of his guests

Why is Jesus so angry?

Jesus frustration
Comes from the circumstances
which led to his invitation to dine

the reading we heard started

**While Jesus was speaking,
a Pharisee invited him to dine with him .**

The Pharisee heard Jesus speaking,
to a large crowd
although he may not have noticed
what Jesus was saying

Jesus had just compared
the crowd of people
Who have gradually gathered
Around him

Compared them
with the people of Nineveh
who were pagans and outsiders
and had no part
in the Lord's promises

But Pagans and outsiders
Who heard the proclamation of Jonah
And repented
and turned from their evil ways

But the crowd Jesus has left
Did not hear and repent
Rather
They accused Jesus
Of being possessed by a demon

Jesus is angry and frustrated
With those who should be
The shepherds and guides of God's people.
The lawyers and the Pharisees.

Leaders who have forgotten
Their history and responsibilities
And found their security
In troubling times
In the keeping of the minutiae of the law

And as a result
Have become a barrier to others faith
To others salvation

Jesus said:

Woe to you lawyers!

**For you have taken away the key of knowledge;
you did not enter yourselves,
and you hindered those who were entering.'**

In the context of Jesus words
The key to salvation for the Jewish people
Was the knowledge
And right practice of the law

For us
Christian disciples
The key to salvation
To the Kingdom of heaven
is Jesus
who has redeemed us

I said earlier
That our behaviour
Is quite similar to the scribes and Pharisees

What I mean is that within the Church
There can be a focus on status
And minutiae of church life

Forgetting that Jesus came
To give us life in abundance
Which always means
Life opening up
Not shutting down

The students who arrived in Chichester
last weekend
Will settle here

And we hope will use their studies
And experiences
To develop a sense of infinite possibility
Of the world opening up
Of horizons widening

I believe this is true for all of us

When we encounter God
Our dependence on the familiar
Drops away

Because our security
Comes from the love of God
and the embrace
of our Saviour, Jesus Christ

