

## **Sermon: Mattins 22.09.19**

### **Ezra 1 / John 7 v 14-36**

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Over the years I've shared a platform with many Preachers. They come in many different shapes and sizes... they also come with many different ways and methods of communicating their message.

There's the shouters and screamers. Do they really think both their listeners AND God have severe hearing problems?

There's the Holy Spirit inspired waffler. The preacher who believes they need no preparation or notes because when they open their mouth... God will fill it! Sadly God often ends up getting the blame for long winded talks with very little Biblical substance.

Then there's the highly animated, highly emotional preachers who chase around the platform waving their hands in the air one minute then falling on their knees and weeping the next. Would their theatrics be more appropriate in a Shakespearean production...or maybe even a 'Carry on' movie?

And, of course, there are the stern faced preachers who show no emotion, no movement and speak in a monotone voice. They would never use humour or smile because the Bible is no laughing matter. Whatever their text, their aim is to try and put the fear of God into people!

But over the years I have come to the conclusion that just as all sizes, shapes and sexes of preachers are acceptable, so we should allow room for all types of communication styles, because what some hate, others really seem to respond to... and if God can speak through the mouth of a donkey in the book of numbers...he can surely speak through all kinds of preachers!

But in the Bible we find that some preachers were far more extreme in delivering God's message than those I've mentioned.

Jeremiah smashed up jars. Ezekiel baked bread over human waste and Isaiah walked around naked for 3 years to name but a few.

The Prophet Ezra from our old Testament reading was a real hard liner. He ordered all the men from Jerusalem and Judean towns to meet him in the Temple compound, threatening severe punishment on any who did not attend. He then made them stand in the heavy rain and cold as he told them that they had to separate themselves from their foreign wives.

But rather than concentrating on the extremes, let's spend a few minutes concentrating on how opposite Jesus was to those mentioned.

Although I'm sure Jesus was an emotional preacher, it's hard to imagine him jumping up and down and shouting at his listeners... although he did say some very strong words, and maybe in a raised voice to certain religious leaders.

Jesus never seemed to force his message on anyone. His message was for those who had ears and wanted to hear, those who chose to listen to what he had to say.

In our reading from John we find Jesus preaching to a very confused and prejudiced audience of Jews.

In Verse 15 we read that they were astonished at His teaching saying, How does this man have such learning when he has never been taught?

I've met some Christians who believe that that Jesus never needed any schooling or education, because being God, he arrived on earth knowing everything.

This would infer that Jesus would never need to use his brain and think, because he'd automatically know the answers to every question ...even before the questioner had thought up what they were going to ask him!

And.... if Jesus did have all knowledge, why was he constantly asking people questions.

Of course, Jesus would have been trained just like all the other boys of His day but the difference was dare I say... that Jesus would have been a perfect student!

Like all lads, up until the age of 5 he would have been home schooled and taught to read and write and learn Aramaic as a second language. From 5 years he was taught by the Rabbis and studied the Torah, the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

He would also have had the option of studying 7 days a week even instead of attending the synagogue because spending time studying the Torah was considered the highest form of worship.

At the age of 12 we know that Jesus must have been an exceptional learner by the way the Priests in the Temple responded to the questions He was asking. Note questions he was asking NOT answers he was giving!

The 'put down' expression of the day was 'Can any good thing come from Nazareth?' and yet Galilee was known for having the best teachers and the most intelligent Rabbis.

It seems that it was the Jewish listeners who were not the sharpest tools in the box! Surely they could see by his following that Jesus was a qualified Rabbi.

Private individuals, lawyers, Pharisees, Sadducees were forever tailing him and they all recognised and addressed Jesus as Rabbi.

So Jesus preaching impressed the crowd but so did the signs following his preaching.

The gospels record Jesus healing 23-30 individuals plus Matthew 12, Mark 6 and John 21 tells us that many others were healed as well. One third of the Gospels or one fifth of all the verses in the gospels relate to healing, deliverance or raising the dead.

No wonder the crowd commented 'when the Messiah comes will he do more signs than this man has done?'

And the fruit from Jesus preaching?

Well, many of the crowd believed in him whilst many of the Pharisees wanted to arrest and kill him.

Jesus words reached into the hearts of those that had ears to hear and wanted to listen... but they had the opposite effect on those who had ears to hear...but would not allow his words to influence their lives.

Let me conclude by reading you the slightly adapted lyrics of a prayer song I wrote for children but of course it's ideal for adults as well.

Lord give me a heart that's true

Help me keep hearing you

Watch over all I do

This is my prayer

Be in my thoughts today

Help me in what I say

But most of all I pray

Make me like you