

Trinity 16 2018 Evensong

Many of you will know the book, *Great Expectations* by Dickens. I love the David Lean film from the 1940s – a visual feast as so many of his film are. Perhaps the most memorable performance is given by Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham – the useless fact for today – Martita Hunt was educated in Eastbourne at a long defunct school. She is splendid as Miss Havisham who has sat in her decaying mansion, Satis House, for thirty years or more since being jilted at the altar. The clocks are stopped at twenty to nine - the time on her wedding morn when she received the letter informing her of the perfidy of her betrothed. The wedding cake and feast still sit on the table, where mice freely run amongst the cobweb shrouded wreckage of her unfulfilled future and she herself is still dressed in the rags of her wedding dress and one slipper. If you know the story, you will know that she adopts an orphan whom she names Estella. The girl is to be trained as her alter-ego in despising and breaking men's hearts as vicarious revenge for Miss Havisham's pain and Pip, the narrator of the story is the eventual victim.

Why have I dealt with this scenario in some detail? Well, both readings talk of judgement, and, particularly in the passage from Matthew, something of the call to forgiveness.... all in that splendidly picturesque way which Matthew so often captures: specks logs, dogs and gates!

This passage comes from the middle of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount – that great body of teaching which forms a whole section of the Gospel. It is not until someway on in the book (I think in chapter 18) that we return to the Lord's further teaching on this question, where he gives us a truly revolutionary understanding of the counter to judgement: **forgiveness**. The account start with a question from Peter about forgiveness – 'Lord, if a member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive.' There's a thought! This morning we had Peter arguing with Jesus about Messiahship. Both scenarios give us pause to think that we often forget that the apostles were absolute flesh and blood characters like you and me. Just imagine them travelling around with each other 24/7 – this curious group with a growing number of other people. James and John – the Sons of Thunder, Peter with his own fiery temper - I wouldn't mind betting that tempers were often frayed. Peter picks a perfect number for forgiveness 'How many times shall I forgive a person who sins against me? Seven times seven? - a number which resounds through our scriptures, from the seven days of creation to the seven seals on the book recorded in the book of Revelation. It is a number associated with God in an almost mystical way.

But 'No', says Jesus. Not seven times seven, but Seventy times seven.....in other words – overwhelming forgiveness..... because, although God is our judge, the Divine forgiveness is absolutely overwhelming to those who repent – or turn Godward in faith.

Jesus leaves us in no doubt that what is required of us in our daily lives is the ability to forgive rather than judge to look at people with new eyes of compassion.

However, sometimes it is difficult, isn't it- to do so. There is something in us which would rather judge than work on forgiveness when we are wronged, or seek to do the right thing

in a given situation before throwing our hand up in the air or banging our fists on the table! It does take real effort and spiritual energy to work through to bring about forgiveness rather than to judge particularly in anger. Sometimes we are more than capable of the same sort of mental action towards ourselves when we judge our own lives and fill the void with self-pity or loathing.

As the American theologian Frederick Beuchner wrote: (*Wishful thinking*)

‘Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past ... to savour to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back – in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.’

Miss Havisham realises this too late for her own earthly peace of mind. A lifetime has been spent feeding judgement, anger and hatred and visiting it upon innocent people.

Friends, we are called to see the world through the eyes of Jesus, with an overwhelming compassion and love - not readily to unjustly judge. Letting go of those things which we sometimes harbour against others takes real courage –and I am as capable of it as much as the next person, and yet here the thing – as summed up succinctly by William Arthur Ward, in his book, *Thoughts of a Christian Optimist*:

We are most like beasts when we kill.
We are most like humans when we judge.
We are most like God when we forgive.

Amen.



Moses and the Messengers from Canaan - Giovanni Lanfranco (1582 -1647)

Exodus 18:13-26

¹³The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. ¹⁴When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?' ¹⁵Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.' ¹⁷Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; ²⁰teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. ²¹You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²²Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.' ²⁴So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²⁶And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves.

Matthew 7:1-14

Judging Others

⁷'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's^[a] eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.

Profaning the Holy

⁶'Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

Ask, Search, Knock

⁷'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

The Golden Rule

¹²'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

The Narrow Gate

¹³'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy^[d] that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.