

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

MATTHEW 7:15-20 "You will know them by their fruits" by Diana Middleditch
w/c Sunday 9th August

I can't imagine that anyone would consider this morning's passage to be one of their favourites. It comes from the Sermon on The Mount; However, there are few things more important to hear than the warning Jesus gives us in Matthew 7:15-20. He begins with the word "Beware . . ."; and we should always take it very seriously whenever Jesus tells us to "beware" of something. I am tempted to say that the thing we most need protecting against in this passage is the most dangerous thing in the world.

I believe that the most dangerous thing in the world is false doctrine. Let me qualify that, terrorism is dangerous, wars are dangerous, nuclear weapons are dangerous pandemics are dangerous, but as much as all these take human life and that is truly shocking it is only temporal and not eternal. Anything that is contrary to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and leads us away from our trust in him is dangerous!

Prophets in sheep's clothing

Two very tradition biblical images are brought together in this verse by Jesus. The first is that of the Israeli prophet, a spiritual guide wearing a fur cloak. The second is the metaphor of Israel as a flock of sheep, whose shepherd-like leaders' role was to preserve them from dangers such as wolves. A sheepskin was an appropriate garment for both a shepherd and a prophet, but here Jesus warns that it can hide something far more disturbing, the supposed protector can be very dangerous, can indeed be a predator.

Here is the warning from Jesus that people can look like inspired leaders but are actually underneath hiding other motifs, like power, greed and wealth, people who are only concerned with satisfying their own unholy appetites. Just because someone wears the garb, or the so called badge of office, does not mean there is any guarantee their ministry is good.

The image of the wolf in sheep's clothing is so strong that the phrase has become a familiar English language idiom. But, whilst it is one thing to know that deceptive prophets exist, it is another to know how to identify one. Little Red Riding Hood is a children's fairy tale that relates so well to this bible reading, and of course this is no accident. A wolf dressed as grandma!!!!

Albert Einstein said, *"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."*

Children's cartoons are also a good source of teaching; do you remember the cartoons where the characters were chasing each other? One of my favourite manoeuvres was the road sign switch. The Tom and Jerry cartoons are a good example of this. Jerry would have done something to upset Tom and then the chase was on. A big sign that pointed the way to go would be turned to point in the wrong direction by Jerry and inevitable Tom would run straight off the cliff. In cartoon world of course nobody came to any harm. As we near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us of road sign switches in the real world and unlike in cartoon world we bruise more easily and really big falls can be fatal.

We are warned to stay away from pseudo prophets and not even stop to argue with them. But how do we tell false prophets, well we are advised to look at the fruit they bare, is it good fruit if not then walk away. In other words look at how they live their lives, what is most important in their lives.

Reflection: Take time to examine your spiritual life. How does it fair during difficult times. How easily can you be persuaded by others? Is there room for doubt and questions in your faith?