

Sermon: 25th Sunday after Pentecost, 2024
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Readings: Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17
Psalm 127
Hebrews 9:23-28
Mark 12:38-44

A few years ago now, when living in the Hunter Valley, I purchased a new (to me) car – a vibrant yellow, Suzuki Swift Sport. I absolutely loved that little car. Interestingly, in the first few days and weeks of driving that car, I saw other vibrant yellow Suzuki Swift's in lots of different places. It seemed like they were everywhere!

What was going on? Well, my Reticular Activating System was well and truly activated. The RAS is a bundle of nerves in our brainstems which activate behaviour, motivation and consciousness/awareness. You see, prior to purchasing that cool little car, I had no idea they existed! But once I had one, and knew just how good they were, I saw lots of them! I am sure you have discovered the same from time to time – be it with cars, holidays destinations, new pets or any other thing...

In a similar vein, is the concept of confirmation bias. I wonder if you have heard of this before. Confirmation bias is when we consciously or subconsciously look for certain answers, experiences, beliefs etc., which align with our own...we seek out that which confirms what we already think or believe to be true. This is something we all do in some way at some time.

How do these things connect with any of our readings today?

Well, I am curious to know if you have heard sermons preached on these verses from the Gospel according to Mark with a focus on good stewardship for example.

This does seem to be a relatively common way to approach this gospel reading from Mark today.

What we 'see' via our RAS might tell us that that is exactly what this reading is about!

Our confirmation bias might heartily agree!

But is it the whole story? I believe there is a bigger picture to explore today.

You see, it's not just about someone being held as an example of sacrificial giving – a widow, going over and beyond...giving everything that she had to the treasury.

Jesus was observing that many people were giving much more than this woman – much more - from their abundance...while she gave everything, from her poverty.

When Jesus calls the disciples together and addresses them about what he has just observed... it's not about the sacrificial giving of the widow. It IS about the broader and wider unjust and immoral systems of the scribes which devours the houses of widows and seemingly contradict the law contained in the Torah (as mentioned in other places throughout the gospels).

Jesus condemns the predatory systems which focus on debilitating and unjust processes.

The Markan Jesus wants us to do better. He wants us to find ways to confront these systems, to think more broadly about how we support those in our communities impacted by such structures.

And importantly, Jesus wants us to invite people to share in the liberating, empowering and equalising love of God.

How might we choose to do that, from today?

Where are the systems of thoughts and behaviours that we can challenge or over-ride through living out gospel values?

Values such as love, inclusion, welcome, generosity...

We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We are expected to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We have a mandate to challenge unjust systems.

Where will you begin that journey today?

What will you begin to challenge, albeit gently, today?

The Lord be with you,

Canon Jane