

## One Day Clergy Conference

James 1:12-18

Psalm 94:12-19

Mark 8:14-21.

Pray.

For me, today is the *first* of a number of 'lasts'.

This is the last short homily I'll preach at a One Day Clergy conference (in this diocese at least!).

And to guard against self-indulgence (mine) – our friends in the 'Lectionary Office' take us straight to the **character of God** in times of change and uncertainty.

There's a cheesy *call and response* that was doing the conference rounds a couple of years ago, that goes like this: 'God is good – **all time**', 'All the time – **God is good**'.

But here's the thing: James subscribes to (the substance or the theology of) that cheesy aphorism.

God's unchanging character is such that he is the font and source of **all** that is good, and right, and lovely, and pure, and life-giving (James 1:17ff) ... as evidenced (for example) in the 'new birth' – the new creation, the new humanity we are in Christ – *through the efficacious word of truth* (v.18) that enlivens and vivifies and reanimates those who (and I quote from James 2:1) – 'believe in our glorious Lord Jesus'!

Such is the abundance of God's goodness that his mercy and kindness extend into eternity ...

Yes, for those who stay the course in the face of trial and adversity – the Lord promises the crown of life (James 1:12); we shall inherit the Kingdom (James 2:2). Ours will be a share in the timeless rule of God.

You know as well as I do that we don't live in a perpetual euphoric and celebratory state. Life is precarious and people, *more often than not*, fall short of our expectations (exhibit 'A' is speaking to you).

And James rightly notes that once our gaze shifts from God's goodness to *our needs* (for whatever reason), life-sapping temptations present as attractive diversions - and may give rise to sinful conduct and spiritual blindness (James 1: 14-15).

There's a useful illustration of this in Mark 8:14ff.

Even though Jesus had demonstrated his authority and power over the created order – in and through his feeding miracles, the hardness of heart, the unbelief, the cynical, self-centred, sign-demanding, mean-spirited influence of the Pharisees – *like leaven working its way through bread* – presents as a distraction to the disciples: They do not understand (or they lose sight of the fact that) they are in the presence of greatness.

What changes?

Well, I wonder if a refocus on the character and goodness of God – as evidenced in Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22) – serves as an instrument (a fillip) for *their* eyes being opened (in part, at least, anyway):

Mark has it that *directly after that* event (in the villages of Caesarea Philippi) Peter declares of Jesus, 'You are the Messiah' – or as Matthew records, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God' (Matthew 16:16).

A statement *which in itself is an expression of God's goodness and kindness* – as Jesus explained to Peter (in the Matthean version) 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven' (Matthew 16:17).

God is good.

And it behoves us (well, me at least) to keep rehearsing this truth in the face of distraction and disappointment and uncertainty. And the little phrase that assists me in recalibrating is right there in James 1:18, 'He chose to give us ...'

- God chose, God elected to lavish me *in and with* his love and mercy and grace (1 John 1).
- God elected to send the Son to deal with my sin, my hard-heartedness, my frailty and unbelief and he reconciled me to himself through his Christ's sin-bearing death and resurrection.
- God elected to place his Spirit within me and raise me from death to life.

The Psalmist pondering the character and goodness of God masterfully opines, 'Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death'. Psalm 94:17.

**So** – let's 'do' cheesy, shall we?

God is good – **all the time**.

All the time – **God is good**.