**Enlightenment**  8/10/23

Read: Mark 4:

Text: Mark 4:21-25

Psalms: 27:1-5, 107:1-9, 66:14-20, 134a

Historians refer to the age dominated by the Church of Rome as the Dark Ages. Reformation day, the day in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg, marked the end of the Dark Ages. The light of the gospel began to shine forth once again, touching hearts and lives of men and women. Not long after this, the so-called Age of Enlightenment or age of reason started in Europe. I say ‘so-called’ because although this age brought enlightenment and progress to western society, its fruit, including of Darwinian evolution, has resulted in a return to darkness in our day. It was a humanistic reaction to the domination of the Church of Rome; it asserted human autonomy and reason based on education, science, and philosophy. The Reformation promoted education and science but not independent of God our creator. The true age of enlightenment came with Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Light of the world (John 8:12).

Through the incarnate Son of God, light shone upon the people of Palestine, the people God had prepared to receive this light. But the leaders of this people rejected the light and the truth Jesus proclaimed in their synagogues. Jesus went out to proclaim this truth to people wherever they were. They crowded around him to listen as he taught them in parables, a method of teaching designed to reveal as well as conceal truth, depending on the attitude of people hearts. Those humbly seeking the truth listened attentively and understood, while the proud who thought they knew everything heard but did not listen to the teacher sent by God.

In the parable of the sower the good ground represents those who hear the word of God and take hold of it with all their being. As the word of truth takes root and grows in the heart it begins to bear fruit in one’s life - enduring fruit. There is no turning back for such hearers. There is no stagnation for such hearers. The more fruit they yield, the more they produce. They are like the tree planted by the river in Psalm 1. They produced fruit in season. They produce fruit all the time.

The gospel writer now reinforces the message of the parable using other sayings of Jesus, sayings about hearing and heeding what was heard. The ‘parable of the lamp’ about putting a lamp on a stand so its light can be seen, was probably used more than once by Jesus in his preaching. Matthew includes it in another context, that of letting your light shine before me (Mat 5:15). Marks reference is, in the first place, to the light of Jesus. We will come to the ‘parable of the measure’ in our third subheading.

**1. Light**

No one lights a candle and then puts it under a bucket or under a bed (4:21). Jesus is again speaking to ‘them’, maybe to his disciples or more probably to the crowd, as he repeats the words, ‘If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear’ (4:23, cf. 4:9). Years ago, and still in places today, a small clay cup containing oil and a burning wick was used to light up a house. I recall a poor man in India asking to have the empty fruit can we were throwing out so he could make a kerosene lamp for his house. We have electric lights but still we put them in the ceiling or on the shelf. What would you think of a person who lit a candle and then put it under the table or under the bed? They must be stupid, or blind. A stupid person does not know the nature or purpose of light. The blind person cannot see light anyway.

‘For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it will come to light’ (4:22). The parable of the sower and the soils has given way to a parable about light. Jesus is no longer the sower but the light. John writes at length about Jesus being the light of the world, about the light shining in the darkness and the darkness not comprehending it. (John 1:5). When the light is comprehended it gives life; otherwise darkness remains, at least until that light becomes the revealing light on the Day of Judgment. This verse seems to point to judgment day. On that day the light will reveal everything. ‘All things are open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account’ (Heb 4:13). Meanwhile, ‘The word of God is living and active, sharper than a two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart’ (Heb 4:13). The word of God is what Jesus speaks about in the parables.

If the light of the gospel has truly shone into your heart, it will be reflected in your life. Matthew gives us this understanding of the parable of the lamp, and it is also relevant to the context here in Mark, the context of the good soil and fruit bearing (Mt 5:15). It is beyond comprehension that a person can continue in the dark after receiving the light of the gospel and believing in Jesus. If your heart has been filled with the light of life, this light must be reflected in your life. If you have been ‘called out of darkness into His marvellous light’ you have been called to proclaim the praises of him who has called you (1Peter 2:9).

‘If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone and all things become new… We are ambassadors for Christ’ (2Cor 5:17-20). If you are an ambassador you do not go around disguised as a local person. If you are an ambassador for Christ - and that is what you are if you truly believe - you do not go around disguised as a person of this world. You reflect the One who sent you. You reflect whose you are and whom you serve, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a lot of beautiful lighthouses along our rugged coastline. I have pictures of many on a calendar. But these lighthouses were not built to be photographed and stuck on a calendar. They were built to give out light. They were built to give light that would save people from being shipwrecked. Why did Jesus save you? For what purpose did he save you? So you could have a rich and fulfilling life? So you could get a good job and settle down and make sure you and your children have everything the world offers? Is your life as a Christian any different to the lives of other people in society? If not, why not? Do you say, ‘I am going to do something really mean to that person after what they did to me’? But wait a minute! Is this what Jesus teaches us? Are you listening to Jesus and obeying him? ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven’ (Mat 5:16). Light from a lighthouse saves; it does not destroy lives. An ambassador lives in a way that makes the king or government he represents look good. Are you living as an ambassador of Christ?

When was the last time you specifically demonstrated a Christ-like behaviour? When was the last time you looked out for the interests of others, or of Christ and his kingdom? When was the last time you prayed for an unbeliever to be saved, and spoke to them of Jesus? When you do pray, and when you do speak, you will be amazed at how the Lord helps you. Jesus promises to give you words to say when you open your mouth to speak of him (Mat 10:19). Remember, you have the Holy Spirit as your helper. You will come away thinking of other things you could have said, but if you have spoken of Jesus, giving glory to him, the seed has been sown. Have the word of God close at hand at all times; in your memory or in your pocket. Have in your hand the ‘sword of the Spirit which is the word of God’ (Eph 6:17).

There are people who call themselves Christians and live morally upright lives but the word of God has never entered their heart and they have no light. The truth is a mystery to them but they make a good show to the world. Some even study and preach, but have no light. For them being a Christian means to keep the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. If others keep these commands without being a Christian then well and good they say. Such people keep away from those who talk about being 'born again' or being 'true believers'. The Pharisees still have their followers today. ‘Take heed how you hear’ said Jesus. One day the light will reveal everything that is secret and hidden. Will it be a day of surprises for you?

**2. Hear**

Back to the matter of parables, and of hearing or seeing the deeper truth revealed in them. ‘I anyone has ears to hear let him hear’ (4:23) is what Jesus said as he concluded his parable of the soils (4:9). Some people, indeed most people, heard an interesting story about a farmer sowing seed and this seed falling on various types of soil, but the disciples discerned a deeper meaning and asked Jesus (4:10). Jesus continues talking to his disciples here in this passage, talking about light, about hearing and about bearing fruit.

‘Take heed what you hear’ said Jesus (4:24; Luke 8:18 has ‘how you hear’). You have heard the gospel preached in this church or in another church. You may have heard the Bible read at home or in the Sunday school. Do you remember anything of what you heard? Has anything that you heard touched your heart such that you have believed what you heard, and that you are now living a new life in Christ Jesus? If so, if you have a believed in Jesus Christ, you will be bearing fruit. You will have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and will be bearing the fruit of the Spirit- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). How long is it since you used this checklist for your life? These days every time someone does something for me they want feedback- ‘How did I do?’ Does the teacher ask the student, ‘How did I do? Are you ready to ask the Lord, ‘How did I do?’ The Lord will assess your love and your labour as his servant anyway. One day all will be revealed, all your thoughts, all your words, and all your actions, revealed before Jesus the judge (2Cor 5:10).

**3. Measure**

The words, ‘With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you’ in verse 24 are familiar to us from Matthew’s gospel where Jesus was speaking about judging others (Mat 7:2). Is he talking about judging others here in Mark’s gospel? Jesus probably used this ‘parable of the measure’ on more than one occasion. The idea of the measure may have come from the basket covering the lamp in verse 21. If you give a full measure, a full measure will be returned to you. In fact, Luke uses ‘measure’ in this way saying, ‘Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over’ (Luke 6:38). Being a good and cheerful giver is a mark of the new life we have and live in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But in the context of hearing and taking heed to what you hear, referred to by Mark, the ‘measure’ and the giving seems to refer to the word of God: ‘To you who hear, more will be given’ (4:24). If you are rich towards God in the way you live your life, you will by no means miss out on the fullness of God’s heavenly blessings. God is no man’s debtor.

‘Whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him’ (4:25; Luke 8:18 has ‘even what he seems to have will be taken from him’). The idea of measure continues; ‘To him who has more will be given’. Jesus is not teaching capitalist philosophy- the rich get richer- but is talking about the kingdom of God and spiritual things. He explains this truth more fully in the parable of the minas and the man who hid his mina/coin in a cloth (Luke 19:11f). The master said, 'Take this mina from him and give it to the man who has used his mina to get ten more'.

‘Use it or lose it’ we are told. This is true is it not? If you learn a language but don’t use it you lose it. If you learn to play the piano but stop playing you use this ability. Right? Beware of stagnating in your Christian life; or worse still, of falling back. The opposite of growth is atrophy; if you are not growing you will be shrinking. Jesus gives the solemn warning, ‘Even what he has will be taken away from him’- or ‘what he thinks he has’ (4:25, Luke 8:18). You will never attain perfection in this life but you must be striving for perfection: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mat 5:48). Only if you understand the mystery of the parable, and are bearing fruit to the glory of God, will you share in the glory yet to be revealed.