

## SERMON 7<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illuminated by your Word, shine with radiance of his glory, that his love may be known in the world as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever. Amen.

I read about an academic study in Australia that looked at why parents sent their children to the schools that they sent them to. In Australia about a fifth of children go to private schools, and the academic study looked at why parents who had a choice over where to send their children, chose the schools that they did.

The research project was long and in-depth, but at the end of the day, it arrived at a simple answer. Parents send their children to the school where parents like them send their children to school. In deciding where to send their children to school, parents looked at other parents whom they thought were like them, and then decided to send their children to the same school as those parents did, those parents who were like them.

It doesn't take long to understand how self-perpetuating this way of choosing can become, and of how narrow a demographic profile this way of choosing can produce. Each private school in Australia is full of children who come from a very similar background and who have parents with similar values, attitudes, incomes, religious affiliation, and so on. Parents send their children to school where parents that they think are like them send their children to school.

I bet this could be applied in any number of social situations. People choose to live in neighbourhoods where people they think are like them choose to live. People socialise at events where people like them tend to socialise. People choose to be friends with people who choose friends like them. People go to church where people they think are like them go to church.

You can see the advantages. When institutions and neighbourhoods are full of the same kind of people then those institutions and neighbourhoods must be more stable, safe, and slow to change. If you want a quiet life, these qualities are advantageous. But you can see the disadvantages too. When institutions and neighbourhoods are full of the same kind of people then those institutions and neighbourhoods can become ghettoised solidifying and deepening differences between communities. They can perpetuate inequalities, harm social mobility, undermine innovation, invention, and improvement.

Anyone who wants to change this social stratification, and invites into an institution like a school, a church, or an opera house, people who aren't like those who tend to go to that school, church or opera house, or when people who aren't like other people move into a neighbourhood, instability, fear and suspicion arise. After all, if we are comfortable being in places with people who are like us, what happens when the people around us change. We now no longer fit in, and we become stressed, angry, resentful.

Stressed, angry, resentful are words we could use to describe the Pharisees in our reading this morning. "Why," they asked Jesus' disciples, "is it that your master eats with tax-gatherers and sinners?" In one sentence you can hear and almost feel the Pharisees rising anxiety. They thought Jesus was like them, a holy man of God, and here he was inviting in people who were definitely not like them.

If that wasn't bad enough, Jesus went further. If you spend time in the institution – the neighbourhood – that we call heaven, you will find there beings who are like gods. If you spend time in the institution – the neighbourhood – we call earth, you will find there people who are like mortals. The difference between gods and mortals was and is a matter of purity. On earth live the impure, in heaven abide the pure.

Jesus, the son of God, recently arrived on earth from heaven touched the impure dead, and restored life, and he was touched by the impure haemorrhaging woman, and healed her. Jesus brought heaven's purity into our impure world, and by doing so also brought our impurity into contact with heaven's purity. It is one scandalous thing to mix together the righteous people and the sinful people, it is a scandalous thing on a different scale to mix together the pure holiness of heaven with the contaminated corruption of earth. But, that is exactly what Jesus did, and what is more, he called this the work of God. He called this mixing together of different people and the mixing together of what is holy and what is profane, good news.

We should pay attention if we want to be involved with building the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus said, "I require mercy, not sacrifice." That is, Jesus requires us to be understanding of difference not requiring of conformity. The world will not be saved when everyone else is just like us. The world will be saved when we are able to more like everyone else. That is, when people everywhere appreciate the diversity of human being.

That's not always easy. If you enjoy classical music played in the Usher Hall, and enjoy the company of people who like classical music played in the Usher Hall, then it's uncomfortable to listen heavy metal rock music played in the Usher Hall amongst people who enjoy heavy metal rock music. It becomes particularly difficult though when we, who consider ourselves righteous, must accommodate those whom we consider to be sinners. But, as difficult as it is, and it is difficult, we must aim to, and try to, do so if we want to build a society that is merciful rather than condemnatory, and loving towards our neighbours rather than suspicious of them, or even worse completely to blind to their existence.

When we celebrate communion this morning, we will do so amongst people who appreciate the celebration of communion, with people who appreciate the celebration of communion in buildings like this, done in this way, and in this neighbourhood. But, the death and resurrection of Jesus, upon which this communion is instituted, and which brought the world Good News, challenges us not just to share communion with each other, but then to go from here to find ways to share our lives with, to appreciate, to understand and to welcome into the company of heaven, people who would never celebrate communion, with people here, in this place, in this way.

*Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.*