

Hard Words: What's on the Inside?
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Luke 11:14-44

I entitled this message "Hard words: what's on the inside?".

That struck me quite powerfully all week, that Jesus sees inside us, he sees clearly and gets to the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem being our hearts. In all the people Jesus encounters in this passage, the issue is their hearts.

But no matter how God challenges us, and no matter how God reveals the brokenness of our hearts to us, we are welcomed to our Lord's table where we receive the body and blood of Jesus the Messiah, and we remember that we are God's beloved children, forgiven and being made new.

Let's work our way through this passage together.

Jesus was healing people. Specifically, Jesus was casting out a demon that was making a man mute. Jesus cast out the demon and suddenly the man could speak. What a gift!

The end of the story should be how everyone gave glory and praise to God, and recognized Jesus as the Messiah. But that's not what happened.

Some people saw Jesus' miracle as the work of the devil. They accused Jesus of casting demons because he was in league with demons.

Jesus first points out that this does not make sense, a house divided against itself will fall. The only way that Jesus can cast out demons is to be stronger and greater than they are. Jesus' power is greater.

And then there are words of warning.

V24 speaks about an unclean spirit that leaves a person, but the person is left empty. Evil can overwhelm the person and they can be left worse off than before.

I think part of what Jesus is getting at is that he is the strong man who can cast out evil, but just casting out evil isn't enough. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus that guards our hearts and minds is what is needed.

Getting rid of one evil in our lives, doesn't make us new creations.

Ever see someone who quit smoking, often they start over-eating. People who quit drinking will often start smoking. We address one issue, one demon that is haunting us and all we do is exchange it for another, or for many others. People who find themselves in abusive relationships often exchange one abuser for another.

Being embraced by Jesus, turning to him and his ways begins to heal us, and helps us take on the new life Jesus offers, so we are not empty.

Those longings for meaning, for purpose, for being loved and valued find their answer in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit begins to fill those places of emptiness and pain.

As Jesus is speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus: "Blessed is your family because of you". But Jesus counters: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

It's hard for us to hear the radical nature of those words.

In Jesus' day everything was about your tribe, your family, who you are related to. If a member of your family rose to power, or ascended the throne, you rose to power, to honour and you shared in the blessing and prestige of your family.

Jesus challenges this; it isn't his tribe that is blessed. Jesus makes it clear that anyone who hear the word of God and keep it are part of his family. The kingdom of God is open to all who hear Jesus's words of life and follow him.

Then Jesus continues to address the heart issues.

The first is about people who are looking for signs from Jesus. Jesus has healed many people, and signs abound, but there is no proof that will satisfy. You can always disbelieve. God will never overwhelm us, in the end, in every case, it will come down to faith.

I prayed with a family whose daughter was dying in hospital. We prayed and God answered the prayer, and she was healed. As far as I could see, the answered prayer made no difference in their lives. And for as long as I knew them, they never acknowledged what God had done.

Faith is always a choice.

In our generation, there a lot of people who like to hang around where the action is happening. They love a show, they love the excitement, the wonder, seeing a great performance. They are fans.

Jesus was never interested in fans and in fact, Jesus discouraged them. Jesus wasn't interested in observers, or people caught up in the spectacle. He was about calling disciples who would be participants in the kingdom and be transformed by being partakers in his mission.

So the only sign they would get is the sign of Jonah. Jesus preaching in the streets calling the people to new life and seeing many receive that new life in Jesus' name.

Jesus' warning in Vs32 is: "The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

Jesus was in their midst, and they were in danger of missing him. The living Son of God was offering them life, calling them to himself, and they were deaf and blind.

Jesus continues to call, to invite, to warn, to heal and bring new life, and there are some who are transformed, lives made new, and there are others who continue to turn away.

This morning as we come to our Lord's table, I invite you to take a moment and let the Holy Spirit examine your heart and speak the truth to you. God's word isn't for guilt or shame, it's to help us find life and so our eyes might be true and healthy.

When we see Jesus rightly, and we see ourselves rightly, then we might be filled with the light of the Messiah.

Where we are broken, we ask Jesus to bring healing. Where we are empty or hurting, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and heal us and make us new.

Where we are struggling with sin, God is faithful to forgive us.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, you see the truth of our hearts.

Where we are broken, we ask Jesus to bring healing.

Where we are empty or hurting, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and heal us and make us new.

Where we are struggling with sin, God you are faithful to forgive us.

We entrust ourselves to you, trusting in your love, knowing that we are your beloved children. Amen.