

Morning Service – October 4th 2020

Meditation: Rules or Guidelines

There's a story told about a supermarket manager who got fed up with complaints about the white lines in the car park. They were too close together, they were too far apart, they were at the wrong angle, there were too few of them, there were too many. So, one night, he arranged for the whole car park to be sprayed over black! It was not long before folk were begging for the lines to be reinstated – they realised they needed guidelines to stay safe, they needed some sort of order to be able to shop together.

Most of us have played games of some sort or another throughout our lives. Have you ever played Snap? Even that most simple of card games has a set of rules which even the youngest have to follow if everyone is to have the same chance of winning. If you graduate to Bridge or Chess the rules get harder to understand but knowing and following those rules is important. Just imagine what it would be like to try to play a proper game of Monopoly with a couple of four-year-olds!

If we want to take part in a team sport we have to learn the rules of that particular sport. You might very well enjoy kicking a football around or passing a rugby ball or bouncing a netball or basketball around on your own or with a couple of friends – you can have great fun doing it any way you like. But if you want to play on a team you have to learn the rules and stick to them or you will not only fail as a team member, you will spoil things for everyone else on your own team and on the opposition.

Some sports are more dangerous than others. Last weekend Lewis Hamilton, one of the most experienced of F1 drivers, was given ten penalty seconds because he didn't follow the rules. He wasn't sure what the rules were for that particular circuit so he asked his team bosses for guidelines; they got it wrong and so he lost out and they were fined. For the sake of the sport, everyone has to stick to the same rules otherwise there is likely to be chaos and worse.

Rules are important if we want to do something with other people and avoid causing problems or worse. In sport the rules are written to keep the game or the sport safe for everyone involved and enjoyable too. In life the same thing applies. If we want to live in harmony with each other and with all God's creation, we must know the rules and we must live by them.

One of the Lectionary readings this week comes from Exodus and is the chapter where we learn about the rules God drew up for the Children of Israel as they began their journey into the unknown, towards the promised land. We most often hear these rules described as the Ten Commandments. God gave them to the people through Moses to help them have a good relationship with their God and to live safely and harmoniously with each other. They were meant to be helpful rather than restrictive. They were meant to prevent problems rather than lead to punishment. In many ways they would be far better called the Ten Principles for Living Well' because, as the forty years passed things changed for the travellers, their numbers changed, they got used to being nomads and being able to participate in decision making. Children were born who knew no other way of life and so new rules, different rules had to be drawn up but the ten principles behind them did not change. If you have nothing else to do you could read through Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Leviticus and see just how many rules were written to modify the Ten Principles to help folk follow them regardless of the situation at the time!

Over the past few months we have got very used to being given rules to live by. Many folk don't like them and many others refuse to follow them. Just like the Children of Israel! But let me ask you this. If you were to be asked to write the rules for safe living today what would your rules be? If you were leading people into an unknown future as Moses was, how would you avoid chaos and dissent and encourage harmony? How would you decide what must be law and what could be locally adapted guidelines?

Just as the Children of Israel complained to Moses at just about every turn of their journey so people this year

have complained about almost every aspect of the rules we have been given and the guidelines for safe living. Some argue for national rules and others for local guidelines. No two families or households are the same, no two towns or villages, no two cities or countries. But we have to believe that someone, somewhere, is doing the best they can to keep us safe. Our journey is one heading into the unknown. We have no idea what the New Normal will be like. Will it be better than the old? What will we have to leave behind and what new ways will we have to learn? Will we make the most of what we have or will we constantly harp back to what we have lost?

As Christians we are blessed by knowing that however hard the way ahead may be we have God to guide us. Whether we think of that guidance as laws or statutes or precepts or commands or ordinances we know that they are for our good. Listen again to what the Psalmist says..... [*Read Ps 19: 7 – 11 again*]

If we do our best to follow his ways, our lives will be richer and more fulfilling. As Christians we are blessed by having the example of Jesus to follow. If we love as he loved and care for others as he cared for all he met then we will find our journey into the unknown takes us towards the kingdom of God, a kingdom where we will live in harmony with all creation.

As we continue our journey together trust in God and in his guiding principles for in keeping them there is great reward. Amen