

Sunday 5 February, 2017 – 8am service

A sermon preached by the Revd Canon Dr Stephen Ames, on the Fifth Sunday of Epiphany.

Readings: Matthew 5:13-20; 1 Corinthians 2: 1-13; Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 112

While the world is coping with President Trump we have been facing up to tragedies on the streets and in the courts and besides all this there has been the Australian Open. This 8am Eucharist has welcomed visitors who were in Melbourne for the Tennis.

I was pleased to see that Nick Kyrgios has done well at the Davis Cup round against Czech Republic. It shows he can lift his game and really shine. It recalled the commentary by Pat Cash and John McEnroe and others on the need for both Nick Kyrgios and Bernard Tomic to lift their game. There is no doubt about their abilities to play exciting tennis. But some other dynamic within gets in the way of them consistently shining. *It's the state of the heart* as the old Mondo Rock hit put it. Something at that level is needed for them to lift their game.

When Jesus says, "Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven" was he saying you have to lift your game or change your game?

What is the game? It is to honour God with your life lived in obedience to God's will revealed in the Torah, the five books of Moses, in the Bible.

You can hear this in Jesus' words, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfil." Not one 'jot or tittle' will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

In this sense it is the same game. But here is the catch. There were people at the time of Matthew who thought Jesus had indeed come to abolish the law. After all Jesus broke the Sabbath, corrected what Moses said about divorce, and abrogated the dietary laws and brought the Temple to a standstill. The claim that not one jot or tittle will be pass from the law until all takes place, seems a lie. How could it be otherwise? So, are we missing something? Yes, two things.

Firstly, in Matthew's gospel various things are said to take place to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. Things like Mary conceiving a child; like the disciples being allowed to take the donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem; like Jesus being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew says these things took place in order to fulfil, or bring about, or make true what was proclaimed in the Laws and the Prophets. So too, Jesus' claim that not one 'jot or tittle' will pass from the law until all takes place, means until all is fulfilled.

Where is it fulfilled? Matthew's Gospel says that Jesus teaching and ministry is where it is fulfilled. How so? Haven't we just said Jesus broke the Sabbath, corrected what Moses said about divorce, and abrogated the dietary laws and brought the Temple to a standstill? How

could he be the one in whom all that the Law and the Prophets required take place, be fulfilled, come true? Well if we go to the end of the sermon on the mount, Matthew 7:12 we find Jesus saying, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." This is the so-called 'Golden Rule'. We find this again in Matthew 22:36-40, where Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus answers with the two great commandments and then adds, "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." So, you see, Jesus is saying that keeping these two commandments is keeping all that the law and the prophets require.

Now some of you may be wondering, "where is this sermon going?" We started with Nick Kyrgios and Bernard Tomic needing to lift their game and then we wondered whether Jesus' words about us needing to have a greater righteousness than the Pharisees meant we should lift our game or change our game. Unlike the Pharisees who adhered to a whole lot of commandments for daily life all taken from Moses or from the traditions of the elders down the years, we have Jesus saying that keeping the Two Great Commandments is to keep all that the Law and the Prophets requires, which includes these two commandments! It isn't obvious how this is a lift in the game and it is at risk of looking like a change in the game, even if not one 'jot or tittle' is dropped from the Law.

How is Jesus' teaching and action a greater righteousness than the Pharisees? In two ways. Firstly, Jesus expounds the Law in terms not just of outward behaviour, but of the state of the human heart that produces the behaviour. It is not enough not to murder, it is a matter of addressing the angry heart. It is not a matter of avoiding adultery, it is a matter of how a man regards a woman shown in how he looks at a woman. It is a matter of not committing adultery with his heart. It is not that what goes into you by eating food that defiles, it is what comes out of the heart, that defiles.

Secondly, the Pharisees are very serious about ordering every aspect of life to conform to the law by not even being at risk of breaking the law. Eventually the commands for daily life added up to 613 commands. Under some conditions, it cost their lives, with terrible suffering rather than deny the Law, rather than break the Sabbath. Jesus acknowledges the righteousness of the Pharisees.

But the fulfilling the two great commandments can't be quantified. It is loving with all your heart and loving your neighbour includes loving your enemies. Obeying the two great commandments in this way will open you up and draw you out into more and more love. This could cost your life as it did for Jesus and still costs people their lives today. But it will be a fuller life, for it opens up all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength from which to greet the world each day.

So, Jesus' teaching and life is a greater righteousness because it is deeper and more comprehensive and it is more authoritative. Remember his words, you have heard it said by them of old, you shall love your neighbour, but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may children of your Father in heaven, who makes the sun to shine the evil and the good. This is one of many claims of awesome authority. Ultimately, this claim was shown to be authoritative because the Father raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his life and teaching against all who opposed him, who betrayed him, and who deserted him, and those who actually nailed him to the cross.

Jesus calls us to follow him, and to do so on his terms, of following his way of living the two great commandments. There is a very fine story in the month's TMA that speaks to this following Jesus. It concerns the main actor in a film that is just being released in Melbourne. The film is *Silence* directed by Martin Scorsese. It is the story of two Portuguese Jesuits who go to Japan in the 17th century to find a Jesuit rumoured to have lost his faith in a country very hostile to Christianity. The actor, Andrew Garfield, who plays the main character, decided to prepare for his role as a Jesuit priest by undergoing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola. This is a 30-day process foundational to Jesuit spirituality. Garfield came from the market place that is Hollywood, to do the Exercises and wanting to confront his own "not-enoughness". What he experienced instead was "falling love with this person Jesus Christ."

To help us we have Jesus' teaching and living example in the Gospel. So again, we are to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest, this teaching and example, remembering all the while how Jesus illuminates living the two great commandments.

But this is not all we have to help us. For through your Baptism you have received the Spirit who unites you to the Risen Jesus at the right hand of the Father. This is renewed every time we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the bread and the wine by which we evermore live in him and he in use. Our hearts have access to the different dynamic of Jesus' love for his Father, which is like the base rhythm of your life. So, as well as the dialogues of the heart which can take a wrong turn, we each can learn to hear and feel this deeper rhythm

So, may I suggest that at the start of each day, you give thanks for the new day, you say aloud the two great commandments and then make this prayer, "Today Lord I place my life in your hands." And now you are up for whatever God opens for you to be and do today.

So you will lift your game because actually, you whole game, that is your whole life is lifted up to another level by God's grace at work in your life. Are we up for this gift?

By the way did you see Tomic said that he couldn't see what Kyrgios's critics were worried about? After all Nick was number 13 on the international tennis rating. So he is doing all right. This misses the point. Cash and McEnroe were not complaining about Kyrgios' ratings, but about the way something else was getting in the he played the game. Kyrgios still needs to lift his game. So does Tomic.