

How do we know that we are in tune with God and his purposes? This is a crucial issue for us as the people of God. It is something that the church has grappled with over the last 2000 years. How do we know that we are still orthodox? Right now the Anglican Church globally is gripped by this issue. This has been precipitated by the consecration of an openly gay man as a bishop in America. The American Church claim that they will not abandon the gay and lesbian people and bow to the pressure of the rest of the communion and not bless same sex unions or consecrate or ordain anyone who is in an openly gay relationship.

Let us be clear on one thing. Every person is precious in the sight of God and this is not an issue of gay bashing, homophobia, or any other label you want to put on it. The American Church are right to reach out to Gay and Lesbian people, the issue is, should their reaching out mean that they move in the direction they have moved?

The passage before us highlights something of the dilemma. Here are the Jews, God fearing and wanting to do the right thing. They are a people who are haunted by the reality of the exile as God's judgment on his people for not fulfilling the Law of Moses.

At the time of Jesus they are under Roman occupation. If you like they are almost in exile in their own country. Foreign Gods are ruling the land that God owns. They are scrupulous in their keeping of the law as they have understood it. And here is the rub. In wanting to keep the letter of the law, they have missed the spirit of the law. But worse than that they have tried to define the law even more, by determining what is the distance one can walk on the Sabbath, etc. In becoming obsessed with not wanting to be exiled again they have missed the other parts of the law, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. They are not merciful, they are not just, and they do not walk humbly with God.

In being focused on what they perceive they need to be doing they have missed the boat when God has done something new in Israel in the person of Jesus.

The American Church have likewise focused on a laudable issue, but got it horribly wrong. They like the Jews of Jesus' day are putting up their interpretation and their understanding of how God operates and claiming that as orthodoxy. This plainly does not hold water. They are refusing to hear the word of God, and of Jesus, and although they are claiming to be God's people, just as the Jews were, they are finding themselves further and further on the outer. They say they are hearing the voices of the gay and lesbian people, but there is no such claim to be hearing the word of God.

This is not about sex or sexuality, it is about listening to and being attentive to God's word, as we have received it down 2000 years. People such as Jack Spong who held an Episcopal office in the Diocese of Newark openly declared that Christianity must change, and he spelt out his 12 theses of how that should happen. It was a manifesto

for the destruction of the church based on the death and resurrection of Jesus and an excuse for the American Church's path that lead to the irregular consecration.

What on earth has all that got to do with us? Well what happened to the Jews in the gospel and is happening to much of the American Church can also happen within our parish. We can also get caught up with what we see as the truth. We can get caught up in thinking that we know what God is doing and how he will operate, and thank goodness, we are actually doing what we believe he to be wanting us to do, so we don't have to change.

That is just plain nonsense. We must always be listening. The verb hear in the passage today can also have the sense of come to know. This seems to indicate that knowing about God is a process that will be continually unraveled. While we might know something of God at any particular point in time, there is still more that needs to be learnt and unraveled for us.

Having an historical claim as the Jews did, will also not exempt us from having to continually work at our relationship with God. We still need to be attentive to the words of Jesus. We need to be a people who are continually opening our bibles and reading the word of God. We need to be wrestling with the text, finding out what others understand this to mean, does that make sense, what might we learn from one another.

Whenever we think we have got it right, and others have got it wrong, and we start to accuse them of being antichrist, or not of God, or something else that is personal, then we have descended to the level of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and Scribes as understood as being the generic Jews in the narrative today.

Only by our continuing affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God, and we are attentive to his words, and we act faithfully on them. Only then do we have any legitimate claim to say that we are being truly the people of God. Claiming to be God's people by history, or by position will not cut it. We might think that we are, but the reality will be quite different. The only way we can truly know that we are the people of God is by being the faithful hearers of God's word as spoken to us by Jesus himself, and acting on it.