

Two kinds of wisdom

James 3:13-18; Mark 9:33-36

Our reading from James this week presents us with two kinds of wisdom. They are presented with a kind of 'either-or' situation. You can be marked by envy and deceit or gentleness and mercy. The two are mutually exclusive. Gosh, if only it were that easy. Wisdom is more nuanced than that.

For example, good parenting sometimes requires tough love. You say 'no' for their own good – even while it breaks your heart.

And look at how our idea of 'freedom' has changed. Once we lived in a world of few restrictions – then we were in lock down. Now we accept a world between... which will certainly have more restrictions than our 'before COVID' times but less than lockdown. We have a new idea of freedom means.

If only wisdom was as simple as either/or – black and white.

And we are tested every day. Jeez – it's so hard to be a good Christian when a waitress is rude to you or someone steals your car spot?

Joyce Rupp tells the story of driving to Chicago to lead a seminar when she was run off the road by a lunatic (my words, not hers). She stopped on the side of the highway shaking with fear – at first...and then shaking with rage. When she could control the tremors, she got back on the road but her head was steaming. Armored in determination – she continued her journey for a few miles until she realized, she was in no fit state to lead a seminar on peace! Should she call ahead and cancel? She wondered. Would that improve her day? Definitely not. She'd be letting a lot of people down.

So how could she change this situation? She said to herself, 'He is a vessel of God's love'. Mind you, she said it through gritted teeth. But she decided to persist. Every time someone changed lanes without a signal, she said, 'he is a vessel of God's love. Every time someone did something stupid and unpredictable, she said, "he is a vessel of God's love.'" There are a lot of crazy drivers in North America – especially on the freeways. After a while, her jaw unclenched, her voice loosened.

As she told the story, I could hear her voice changing from a near scream to a lilting blessing as she merrily continued her journey blessing all the way and arriving in fine form.

I guess sometimes it is an 'either – or' situation. How I choose to respond is about the only thing I have control over – almost. After all, I am only human.

Which leads me to our 2nd reading. Who is the greatest? The greatest what? Joyce didn't tell this story to make us feel she was a better disciple than we could ever hope to be. She was talking about the wisdom of restraint.

The question – or should I say, the struggle for us is, how to accept that we are small and God is big. If we can be more like the child, who doesn't let ego get in the way, we could be more than we can ever imagine. That is so counter-intuitive.

I *want* to say 'I good at my job – therefore I am the greatest' ...but that is not how it works. It may not be the greatest theologian in the world that changes someone's life but the kind and simple words of one of our Op Shop volunteers.

Or a question from a child?

Or you.

We don't live in an 'either-or' world. Wisdom is truly nuanced. But sometimes we have to make stark choices.

Vaccination may be one of them...and how we treat others, another.