

Words for the way, pastoral notes during Pandemic –The real thing

Third Sunday in Lent

Genesis Luke

Opening Prayer:

May the words which we hear and read, and upon which we meditate, speak to our hearts, our minds, and our souls. May God the Holy Spirit be with us here at this time and in this place. Amen

The parable of the Jade Carver

A long, long time ago on the banks of the ancient Yangtze, there lived renowned carver of jade. The old jade carver was known as 'Genghis.' The name Genghis in the local tongue means 'just' or 'righteous.' The local miners would deliver the rough green stone jade to Genghis' workshop every few days. The old man would then slowly cut away the other minerals, and slowly carve out the most beautiful sculptures, vessels, and jewellery. Then he would spend countless hours polishing the gorgeous green stone into wonderful pieces of true magnificence.

Genghis was getting older and older, but he had no son or daughter to take on his craft. Genghis' wife had died some years prior, Genghis was alone, but he had his beautiful creations which people would take away and the joy in their eyes was enough to warm old Genghis' heart. Genghis would sit at the end of each day quietly reflecting on the day's events, in his heart thanking God for life and gifts which he had been bestowed.

Near to Genghis' house and workshop lived a family who had a son named Hu. The name Hu means 'tiger.' Hu was like a tiger a bright young boy who loved to model animals and other shapes from the clay he gouged out of the banks of the Yangtze. Hu's father one day was speaking to Genghis and conversation came to that who will be the jade carver once Genghis was gone. This conversation led to the arrangement that young Hu would be apprenticed to Genghis, to learn the beautiful art of carving the precious green stone.

Soon each morning young Hu would walk down to Genghis' workshop. Hu carried his lunch consisting of rice and a little chicken or fish as may have been available. All lovingly prepared by Hu's mother ensuring that the new emerging artisan was well nourished for his day's work. Upon arriving at Genghis' workshop, the old jade carver had a three-legged stool in the corner of the workshop he would sit young Hu on the stool. Genghis then would give Hu a small piece of rough jade for him to hold in his hand. Hu would feel the rough stone at first cold, but over time warm from the heat of his hand. Hu would feel the rough texture, the lines of other minerals in the stone. Hu would observe the changing colour of the stone, the various verdian, deep green and light hues of green.

Old Genghis would work his craft on his bench, all the while he would talk to Hu, telling the young boy of God's creation, the value of life, the depth of peace one may find in being content with what one needs. Young Hu did not mind the talks of the old man. Nor did young Hu mind watching the old artisan at work creating the most spectacular works of art.

Over the months of his apprenticeship young Hu was getting frustrated. For old Genghis never gave Hu a piece of jade to carve for himself, nor did old Genghis allow the young Hu to feel the tools of the carver's trade, and how they felt cutting into or the surface of the green stone. Young Hu did not get to polish the delicate stone surfaces. Young Hu just sat on his stool holding a random piece of rough jade. The frustration was building in the young Hu. After a year had past Hu's frustration and annoyance were rising to boiling point. Young Hu's frustration had risen to the point that one Monday morning Hu decided that he would finally speak to the old master. Hu was just going to tell old Genghis that the way he was being treated was intolerable and that he would not just sit in the corner holding a piece of rough stone and doing nothing with it. Hu would demand that Genghis would start to show him the craft or he would run away from this so-called apprenticeship.

On the Monday in question Hu walked in the workshop. In silence sat on the stool in the corner as he had done for all the previous months. Old Genghis came into the workshop with warm smile and greeting, handed a rough portion of jade to Hu and was about to set about the regular conversation and work. It was at that point that the young Hu jumped up off the stool and in an angry voice said to the old man:

"You have done nothing to teach me, you have wasted my time. You just go on with YOUR work, and not let me do anything! No wonder that the craft will die out it will be because the likes of you have not shared your art with anyone. Furthermore, now you do not even give a real piece of jade to hold!"

As the young man's outburst came to a decrescendo, Old Genghis, looked at the young Hu, a smile and tears appeared simultaneously on the old weathered and wrinkled face. Genghis spoke:

"My young apprentice tiger, you have just shown that you have mastered the most important lesson that every jade carver must intimately know. What is real jade!" My young tiger, all these months you have held real jade, you have felt jade, seen jade, you have gotten to know what really Jade is, and now you know what is false jade. Now, you are ready to carve the beautiful green stone."

Parable explained

In verse 2 of the Isaiah reading, we read:

**Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.¹**

In our world there is so much that is faux, not real designed to fool. But these faux things are not real, and such will not satisfy our souls. The false is provided by the chief of charlatans, the father of lies – Satan, the evil one. But God our loving creator is real and give us real food, sustenance the best and the richest possible. The evil one works in the short term but God our Heavenly Father, the Lord works for the everlasting.² The Lord's ways are higher than our ways³, we are given the everlasting promise of the saving grace of Christ.

¹ Isaiah 55:2

² Ibid 55:3ff

³ Ibid 55:9

The message of the Gospel is real and calls us to repent. In our Gospel reading today we are told of couple of incidents⁴. The common thinking at that time and even may be seen to creep into ours that disasters befall people as a deserved punishment. In Hinduism and Buddhism this is known as 'Karma.' But karma is a teaching not found in the Gospel. The real message of the Gospel calls us to repent and repent now. For whilst we may not know what may befall us in the future we know that as repentant people we are in the hands of one who loves us, cares for us, and holds our future.

Our own Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia under the heading of *Reformation Witnesses*, it states

*The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the Reformers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner the Uniting Church will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). It will commit its ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.*⁵

One of those great documents is *the Heidelberg Catechism*. This teaching or catechism in its first lesson for *Lord's Day 1* says the following:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own,
but belong with body and soul,
both in life and in death,
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.
He has fully paid for all my sins
with his precious blood,
and has set me free
from all the power of the devil.
He also preserves me in such a way
that without the will of my heavenly Father
not a hair can fall from my head;
indeed, all things must work together
for my salvation.
Therefore, by his Holy Spirit
he also assures me
of eternal life
and makes me heartily willing and ready
from now on to live for him.

This my friends is, the real thing and ever giving us hope.

⁴ Luke 13:1, 4

⁵ Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia 1992 ed

© CMV 2022

All Bible references are from the New International Version © 2018 Zondervan