

## Careering or Caring?

Jeremiah 11<sup>18-20</sup>; Psalm 54; James 3<sup>13-43,7-8a</sup>; Mark 9<sup>30-37</sup>

*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. [James 4<sup>8</sup>]*

If Christianity was a career, how would your Christianity be described?

I ask this because it is very clear from the readings that ambition for status is decidedly unchristian, but complacency isn't good either!

- ✠ Jeremiah is a good role model for us. Until God pointed it out, he was unaware that those around him were plotting to kill him. In this the first of Jeremiah's laments, following on from his support of Josiah's reforms in the temple and kingdom (openly supported but secretly resisted), Jeremiah is particularly hurt by the fact that he would have died without anyone to carry his name on - **let us destroy the tree with its fruit** - and that mattered. Jeremiah's response was to depend on a caring God - **but you, O Lord of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.**

(As an aside, retribution in this sense isn't a bad thing as Jeremiah leaves the initiative with God).

Jeremiah's ambition is to be the prophet that God has called him to be (probably, the most miserable prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures) and everything else is God's business.

- ✠ David, the author of our Psalm, is also a good role model. He is living under the very real threat that King Saul wants him dead. If anyone was a career person of faith, David was. He knew himself to be God's anointed, the King in waiting, but was also aware that those around Saul weren't his friends - they are **the insolent that have risen against me, the ruthless that seek my life.**

David - perhaps because he was aware of God's hand on him has a positive attitude: **surely God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life**; and, using the future tense (a great example of faith) **I will give thanks to the Lord**; and likewise, in the future, **he has delivered me.**

David is confident - like Jeremiah - that what happens to the others is God's initiative, but he looks forward to seeing it!

- ✠ James, true to form, is brutally honest about the good and the bad in Christian ambition. **Envy** and **selfish ambition** are set in opposition to **wisdom from above** that is known to be **first pure, peaceable, gentle. Partiality** and **hypocrisy** are set against **mercy and good fruits. Disputes and cravings** are set against **submission to God.** There is no point being ambitious to be anything other than God calls us to be and great benefit from embracing his exacting call on our lives.

- ✠ The Gospel takes us, as we might expect, to the heart of things. Jesus has told the disciples what comes next - betrayal, death and resurrection. Whether through wilful ignorance or just an embarrassed change of subject, the disciples didn't understand. The disciples followed this up with a discussion - one that they had the good grace to be embarrassed about - regarding their career choices as disciples - they hadn't understood so did what we all do: focused on ourselves - **who is the greatest!** An interesting discussion in the presence of God in human form! Jesus response is to take a child and makes it quite clear that greatness comes through service. In the culture a *παῖδον* would be a member of society with no rights and no real place. Embracing in love those who cannot benefit you is the key thing.

So, how ambitious a Christian are you? Ambitious for God, or yourself?