

There is an episode of Dr Who which I am often reminded of when I am watching the news, or political broadcasts. It took place when David Tennant was playing the role of the Dr, and during those episodes you get to see the relationship between the Dr Who character and the Prime Minister –Harriet Jones of Flydale North ! These two characters are working together in this episode to stop what is perceived to be an alien invasion. The Doctor is trying to do this peacefully, but just as it looks like peace is going to come the Prime Minister orders the destruction of the unknown creatures.

There is much upset at which point the Doctor says, I do not need a weapon to bring down a Prime Minister, I only need three simple words, the Doctor whispers in the ear of the Press Secretary ‘She looks tired!’ – we later find out she is gone in 6 months.

I always find it a poignant point – words – and often false words – can bring about tremendous change.

When we do not agree with a political point of view or action, or when we are uncomfortable

with someone, often the way to deal with our discomfort is to discredit the other.

In Mark's Gospel today we encounter a Jesus who is being discredited not with three words, but with 7. "He has gone out of his mind." (verse 21). The crowd around Jesus are attempting to dismiss the views and actions of Jesus and limit the influence he is having; and can have.

What is alarming about what is recorded here in Mark is *that they're not just saying it here and there, once in a while, or under their breaths. No, they're saying it outloud, in public, and even to his own family. Not only that, but his family seems to buy it. They are moved to action because "people were saying," as Mark notes, "He has gone out of his mind" (v.21).*¹

Jesus is making the community he is in uncomfortable – his power is pervasive, and his sphere of influence is growing by the day. On face value it looks like what Jesus is doing is good - *he is healing anyone and everyone in need and casting out demons and doing all this even on the Sabbath. He is, in other words, breaking the rules to make sure everyone can experience God's grace.* So why does this

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/06/pentecost-3-b-crazy-love/>

challenge the community so much – why this focus on his madness – or even that he is unwell?

As David Lose reminded me this week it is because of Jesus not only radical inclusion but also how much he was shaking up the understanding of who God is. This is happening in two ways:

First, he's defying norms about who's in and who's out. He is healing those possessed of demons, or who were excluded because of their condition and allowing them to take a full and whole part in the community.

Jesus forgives and heals all who are in need. Everyone. No exceptions. And as we see at the end of today's passage from Mark – Jesus is extending this further - all who do the will of God are his true brothers and sisters and mother, radically redefining what constitutes a family in an age when family was everything.

Second, Jesus putting the need of the people he encounters above the religious traditions that regulate the lives of the people. Make no mistake: these religious traditions are important, useful, and valuable, but –when we put following the

rules ahead of meeting need, misused the very rules God gave us to help us flourish².

The community in Jesus day didn't like their status quo or safety challenged anymore than we do today – so as a result they use fear of madness, or the unknown, or instability – to question if Jesus really is as clever as they think – surely he is just a problem.

It has made me think a lot this week about who we as a society, or even as a local community here is Queen's Park seek to discredit – and why? It has also made me wonder about the way we discredit different teachings of our own faith when we find them uncomfortable or difficult.

Jesus was working hard to help his community to see that life could be more inclusive, more whole, and more fulfilling – all could flourish in the kingdom of God. Why do we still struggle with this so strongly, why is it hard for human communities to include others?

During the week I was meeting with a person, about my own age, who has struggled with an illness which was bought on by an extreme

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/06/pentecost-3-b-crazy-love/>

traumatic experience. The illness requires that they now take regular medication to stay balanced and some days just to get out of bed. I was shocked by the number of experiences that they had had with Christians who said if they just prayed enough surely, they would be healed and no medication would be required. There was no compassion for the condition, but rather a judgement that they should get better. This is discrediting in the same way as well – not recognising or valuing a persons lived experience. Mental Illness continues to be the largest silent killer in our society, and one of the reasons for this is that we discount an individual experience, or judge it, in a way that makes people fearful to be honest. (sadly for many religion is often used to limit rather than heal)

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus attempted to rid the world of this stigma, and it still needs to be one of the main focuses of the church today. Christian Community, Church, needs to be a safe place for us to express our brokenness as much as our flourishing – this is the inclusion that Jesus risked his family for – this is the inclusion that Jesus was working to create.

We won't always understand – we don't have to – but we do have to have the courage to be a space and a place where it is safe to say we don't.

David Lose put it this way, anytime we draw a line between who's in and who's out, we discover Jesus on the other side, identifying with the other, caring for them, and loving them...just as God loves us.

St Anne's has always been proud of our commitment to being an inclusive community – but what does this mean – what does it look like?

How do we ensure that we are not asking questions that discredit, or drawing lines in the sand with God on the other side?

Mostly I think it means we need to be constantly vigilant – asking ourselves and each other – are we being the people we seek to be? Have we noticed that a person is missing, or sad, or happy, or hasn't spoken to someone? Have we asked how some one is and taken time to listen to the answer?

Jesus was a busy man who was driven to achieve a great deal of things, and yet he still saw those who were invisible to others, those who needed to be welcomed in. The hardest question I think to

ourselves as Christians is to have the courage to ask – who am I not seeing? But of course, we can't always see where our bias might be.

Today's message in Mark is not comfortable, it is confronting. It was confronting to Jesus family and followers; and it equally challenges us to step outside what is comfortable and familiar to us and ask questions about how we behave.

Later, Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians reminds the early church of the same thing – he depicts the life of faith in the starkest terms. Yet Paul encourages them, while faith does not immune us from suffering, through faith, as our “outer” self may be threatened our “inner” self is being “renewed daily”³. He is attempting to help the early church to see, especially a church which is under siege, that there is a distinctive way of perceiving and responding to life, one that involves attending to what is “unseen” (which is eternal) precisely amid what is “seen” (which is temporary). Paul reflects on this understanding of Jesus ministry as Perceiving all that happens to us in this way gives us courage – a courage to live in

³ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3678

a new way. And a way that may be different at different stages of our life.

Paul offers one point of view to the Corinthians, it may not be a way that works for us. Mark's Jesus challenged his community to find courage in knowing we are part of Christ's family, valued and vital.

As we come to that time of the year when summer over takes, and regular routines step sideways, what might sustain us? What messages might we need to see or hear to enable us to grow and be an inclusive community?

Jesus highlights the need for courage and grace; and maybe as we ponder our readings today, and the tasks that lay ahead of us this week, we need to have the courage to do the same. To not discredit those who make us uncomfortable, but to ponder if there is something that we are challenged to change. Amen.