

Sun. 8 June 2018 Yr B Mark 6 vs 1-6

The week following my ordination, I was carrying a full washing basket up stairs, when the youngest of my three children, Edward, stopped me and said to me, "Mum, you know in the ordination service you said that you loved God above all else?" "Yes" I say. He said, "Well does that mean you love God more than you love us?".

Well you can see how putting your head above the parapet and declaring your faith to love God above all else can alienate those around you. I'll come back to how I dealt with that later.

You see, there is something dangerous about becoming a person who publicly declares their faith, and then Sunday by Sunday stands up and tries to speak about God's Kingdom in the here and now. You are speaking in a dangerously public setting about something that is intensely private, and your friends and family may feel anything from curious, like Edward, to vulnerable and open to those around about them. I always think when a person answers a calling it is hardest on those around them, the person being called has the faith the others stand around thinking where did that come from??

Jesus found hostility in Nazareth, and you can even understand why when he Jesus is going around teaching about the Kingdom, that even his family is a little embarrassed of his fervor. It happens to us all. So much so, when I was training I did say to my three you don't have to tell people at school what I'm doing if it makes it easier for you. However, they were blessed, their friends thought it was "cool" so there were no problems there.

I'd like to say the same about one of my adult friends. One bonfire night I rushed to catch up with Ernie and the children on their way to a firework display with some friends, coming straight from a funeral, I was wrapped up in my coat but underneath I had still my collar on, a friend there caught just a small glimpse of it under my scarf, she said to me sharply, "Oh never off duty these days are we?". What I wanted to say was, no actually not really, once a priest forever a priest, what I did mumble embarrassedly was, "I've just come straight from a funeral". She smirked and we both turned and spoke to someone else. FAIL!! So ...

Jesus returns to his home.... he comes as a teacher. It makes you wonder what it felt like for him, here he was bringing this wonderful message back to the people he grew up with and loved and cared for and they greet him not with wonder and thankfulness, but with contempt!!!

But don't we do that too? Don't we sometimes ignore the person sat quietly who doesn't say a lot. Maybe you have been that one that has been quickly disregarded or dismissed; or talked over by a louder voice? When it is those closest to you, it can hurt more.

Thoughts come to my mind, can we identify those around us, people we know well, someone who all too often gets disregarded or shouted down? "Oh it's only Joe Blogs", we might say. Let us think for a moment how important would the message have to be before you took them seriously?

The people of Nazareth asked, could such an amazing man come from such an ordinary town? Well amazing people come from somewhere!

This is why we are asked to love others as ourselves, God wants us to look upon others with the eyes he has for you. In doing so, in affording another the same courtesy you would like to have, you begin to have the eyes of truth, realising God's presence in another helps you to overcome the superficial and look deeper into the other's heart and understand more not only of them, but the world around, it helps us reject false attraction, and see the person within.

But whatever we feel in these situations, for Jesus we need to multiply it; he was not just another Church speaker, offering hope in God, he was not just another prophet. He spoke, it appeared, with his own authority that the Kingdom was coming, then and there; and if there was any doubt at all, he demonstrated by miracles, the Kingdom of God. But in Nazareth there was doubt, hence Jesus did not do so much there as a consequence. They'd heard what he had done, but now were mocking, challenging him to do the same in the town where he was known. The Aussies have a phrase for this the "tall poppy syndrome" but to be honest there was more to this than

just putting the local lad in his place. Jesus message was dangerous, it was radical, and ignoring his message appeared to be the safest option for the locals. Just how dangerous his message is we discover in his arrest and crucifixion.

But for Jesus, his family eventually followed, his brother, James for one; Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection and James became the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He was the anchor of early Christianity; he grew on from being the puzzled and angry younger brother.

We all have these dramas in our lives, squabbling siblings, and its hard to see them as good and decent adults when all we remember of them was how they used to take our stuff, or ridicule the things we said and did. Yes, also we all have the friends and families who ridicule our faith or what we do, what we have to learn is the ways in which God works in different hearts and lives. We need to love our families and all those who ridicule us, whatever they do or say, forgive and be forgiven for our younger wayward selves along the way.

What is paramount is for us to keep the bigger picture in the forefront our minds, and see what God is doing in, not only, our own lives but in the world around us, and indeed, listen to the smaller quieter voices of individual humans living the smaller picture all around us. There has been many a rebellious heart that has turned around and become someone of great faith and prayer, not by our hard works but by the grace of God. Remember Jonah and the Ninevites? The people of Ninevah faced being overthrown. Overnight a rejection of God's way can change into one of acceptance, and that is all God needs. When God saw their acceptance and how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

So lets be gentle with our friends, lets be forgiving and loving, and turn that cheek; and when called upon, have the courage to continue with the words of truth albeit uncomfortable or possibly even dangerous, but always listen to others and treat others as we would wish to be treated.

Oh and Edward, how did I answer him? I told him, I did indeed love God above all else and that I had sworn to this in my ordination but that I believed he and the rest of my family were a gift to me from God and so how could I not love and cherish them as such. He did then say to me I'm a gift from God??? I quickly added **to me** you are!!!

That is it, realistically, we do need to treat all those whom we cross paths with as a gift from God into our lives. A gift of a challenge maybe, but a gift we need to treasure and be grateful for because we are all in God's hands. We too are wrapped around by God's love, as we cherish others allow yourself to be cherished by God. When everything is centred on God's love, it is then, we will find true healing.

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