

Sermon for First Sunday after Trinity – Mark 3:20-end

Setting the scene for the Gospel reading....

As we think about our Gospel reading today – we are reminded how the Gospel according to Mark is written at a fast-pace, urgent and immediate. It is time for the tide to turn and Jesus has come to do just that – and he is certainly making waves today...

We can look at this story from different angles, but for now let's think about Jesus' family. Perhaps they run a respectable carpentry business, good members of the local community. Perhaps Jesus was a really good carpenter – but has now left home...

He has begun to travel around like a vagabond – drawing crowds with his teaching, healing and casting out demons. They will be worried for him no doubt – and quite rightly so. As people begin to be stirred and inspired by Jesus – and as they begin to follow – perhaps some are leaving families and jobs in a time where there would have been no support from any other way – imagine that there might have been family and community disruption to say the least – so perhaps there would have been opposition to Jesus in other places brewing apart from the scribes and Pharisees. Imagine the chaos amidst the euphoria of this amazing man preaching good news of hope and a new way of peace.

Imagine now the scribes who have come along to put an end to it all. They are annoyed and angry with the way Jesus is gathering followers and stirring up trouble as people begin to see things in a different way – and so they begin to put a spin on things – to discredit him with accusations of having lost the plot – 'He has Beelzebul'

We know that Jesus, the Son of God, the saviour of the world, is standing before them – rich in God's presence and hope for a way to peace and justice and love – and they are denouncing him 'mad'. Isn't it easy to distort things when they are not producing the results that work best for our own opinions and ideals – and I don't think that this is only the way for the scribes and Pharisees, do you?

Let us now hear the Gospel reading – and think about each of the players – think of their situations and where they are coming from in their own position.

Where are you coming from in this story?

They denounced Jesus as mad – even his family were being swayed to agree... But he wasn't – was he?

Jesus was opposing 'Satan' – that personification of all that is dark and evil – he was showing people a way out from that through spiritual, emotional and physical healing – and as Paul shows us in the first reading – from an openness to that healing comes the ability to forgive, to reconcile, to come together and create new family and community bonds between people that know no boundaries.

Jesus was trying to share the good news of a more loving and peaceable way – to show them that nothing is beyond repair or redemption – but by denouncing and slandering the Holy Spirit they are blocking off that pathway that leads to forgiveness and reconciliation – no matter how religious or Godly they claim to be, there is a new way of seeing things that is demanding attention, rocking the boat, stirring the waters.

Isn't this a good illustration of how we can miss out on the presence of God – how we can close our hearts and minds to new ideas or be frightened that a new message might erode all that we have once held dear and true – and miss the point that one can fall alongside the other and that out of the old – and the new – a way of living and thinking and being can rise up that works for the situation and time that we find ourselves in right now – for ourselves – our family life – work life – church life – community life...

And isn't that what is happening now as we come to this point in the Pandemic / lockdown journey where we are rising from so many changes that have happened. New ways and ideas are emerging that might threaten the old norms and secure patterns. It is perfectly understandable, but with Jesus at the centre, he is saying to all back then who were acting out of fear and insecurity to trust him – he is not mad – a world without love and justice and peace is mad – he is urging them to listen to him and follow him on to better and brighter days – and we can be encouraged that this is what Jesus is doing today for us – encouraging

us through the spirit of hope that is rising up – to step out and open our minds to new ideas and new ways that will see us through the times we're in today.

Of course, there are modern day stumbling blocks – in social media, in people taking advantage of the situations people find themselves in, but there is also positivity – more people accessing church – community projects and support online and through social media – a community spirit coming out of social media – new patterns of living that offer richer work/life balances are emerging out of the darkness of social, economic and emotional trauma of recent days.

The hope in today's reading is that despite all that happened with the grappling that went on between Jesus and the religious authorities of the day - we know the ending and ultimate outcome that has travelled through the eons of time and is imparting in our hearts today – faith in a loving and living God who desires our wellbeing and flourishing and who shows us how that can happen in its broadest sense through Jesus and modelling our lives on that way.

Family and community boundaries are merging as we are being called to be brought together as one by being members of God's overarching family community – a community of communities – and a community of companionship.

So, here's an idea for this week – who has a Jenga set in their household? I suppose you could use a pack of cards too! This week, I invite you to build the biggest tower you can – and as you do, ask yourselves the following questions

- How can I be encouraging this week – how can I be encouraged?
- What can we do to make a difference in our church community and for the community – what part can I play?
- Who has built me up recently – how can I build up others this week?

Bishop Jo wrote that John Wesley is reported to have said that the purpose of preaching is to 'disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed'.

Well, while we have had much disturbance in today's reading, there is also much comfort. We are on the right track – we are still here and we are gathering again – and the world is gathering again as the barriers of darkness are being broken down so that the light can shine in – we are being held, encouraged, and emboldened to go forward in faith that God is with us through the spirit of Jesus who will guide and show us the way.

Thank you for our beautiful world.
Thank you for those who look to make it a better place;
for their encouragement, their care, and their love.

We are sorry for the times we have not built a better world,
thoughtless instead of caring;
pulled people down when we had the chance to build them up.

Thank you that you always give us another chance.
Help us to build rather than destroy,
to love rather than hate and, in doing this,
walk closer with you. **Amen**

Revd Jacqueline Drake-Smith, June 2021