

Ordinary 10 to Ordinary 13

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Year B Ordinary 10

Mark 3. 20 -35

The Forgivable Sin

Mark 3.28 I assure you that people can be forgiven all their sins

The Unforgivable sin

Most of us will have known a situation where things have gone wrong and there seems no way to restore relationships.

How much worse if our relationship with God were irrevocably spoiled and broken!

But before anyone goes home asking, 'Is it me?'

be assured - if you are worried about having committed the unforgivable sin Jesus spoke about you can be sure, you haven't! If you had you would not be worried.

Because

as we are clear from this account of Jesus with the Jewish lawyers

- the unforgivable sin - sin against the Holy Spirit

it is to look at God in Jesus

- all his truth and goodness

- to see him healing people's bodies - straightening out lives - restoring families

- teaching the kingdom way of love, forgiveness, non-retaliation

- and say - '*this is the work of a man with the devil in him!*' *The man's mad!*

The Most Important word

We can get absorbed in questions about the unforgivable sin

- and miss the greatest message - about the **forgivable sin !**

People can be forgiven ALL their sins

and made to be forgiving, like God who IS forgiving love.

This was a revolutionary word in the 'eye for an eye' society of the time

For it claimed

All the wrong in the world

All the brokenness, the bitterness, the hurt,

can have God's

and his added strength enabling us to ourselves, be forgiving

as we let his Spirit love through us

Sign of the Cross

The Cross is our sign of God's forgiveness

The events and words of Jesus' Cross simply repeat what happened here in this story

God loves his world

God took the risk of loving - at the cost of his Son's life - freely offered

Today we still look to the Cross of a crucified and Risen Saviour

- believe him - and find the burden of sin, guilt, shame lifts

in the knowledge of his forgiveness

- and go on to discover the power of his love to make us forgiving too

Christian history is crammed with the testimonies of cross-bearing love

- the Church's greatest victories when people have been when people have received the gift of forgiveness
and halted a cycle of bitterness and recrimination

For Today

This is the simple message our world needs to hear today
- from God - through our lips

God loves you

God forgives you

God enables you to forgive

There is a way to peace, reconciliation and new beginnings for you and your world

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Year B Ordinary 11

Mark 4. 26 - 34

Faith Assessment

Mark 4: 26 – 29

A man scatters seed in his field ... the seeds grow ... he does not know how it happens.

A Risky Business

Risk is defined as: *Exposure to the possibility of loss, injury, or adverse circumstances*

In agriculture a thousand acres or a small urban allotment - can be a risky business

- the unpredictable changes of weather

- an invasion of pests and disease

The parable Jesus told about a sower is all about risk

The exposed rocky places

seed carried on the wind,

hungry birds, too much sun,

too many thistles and other weeds

– and no mention of parasites!

Risk Assessments

Of course, that farmer didn't have an agricultural officer advising him about risk assessment

Although that is not such a new thing:

Risk assessment can be traced to the middle ages and increased international trade by sea

Traders could sustain substantial losses when a ship went down in a storm

So the insurers became involved – and premiums were assessed according to risk

Now, even small chapels assess risk as their public responsibility

BUT I've not yet seen a set of assessment papers with questions like:

What about the risk of walking through the church door – and meeting God!

What about the risk of conversion and having your life turned around completely!

Risk or Faith

Risk is mostly seen from a negative point of view
Because the things which concerns us are those which may be dangerous
and cause injury to ourselves or others

BUT there is a positive side to the risk assessment

Wanting to be safe

- caring about the comfort and well-being of others.

Wanting to be the best.

Trusting one another

And there we are in the realm of trust - Of FAITH

In the parable of the seed growing secretly

The farmer is taking a positive risk

He is making an act in faith

He doesn't know how, why, when the seed will sprout and grow

But he drops it into the ground

And in his mind is a picture of fields of ripened grain

That is positive risk. That is Faith!

How Risk becomes Faith

So what makes faith a positive risk?

our farmer in Jesus' parable almost certainly, would answer -

It's all about what's behind me and in front of me

Knowing the facts and having a vision

Knowing the Facts

It's first about knowing the facts.

He parted with the seed.

having done all he could to ensure that land was prepared and ready to receive it.

just as previous generations had done

- and there had always been a harvest - both large and small yields

He didn't need to know what was going on underground

- the plants would appear!

It is like that with our faith in God

Our trust in his promises of seedtime and harvest for the whole world

Our trust in all that he has done for us and offers us in Jesus

- in changed life

- freedom from wrong

- hope for the future

There are so many questions we cannot answer - so many '*how's?*' and '*Why's?*' over which we theorise.

But on the basis of God's Word

- in scripture

- through the testimony of his people

We have the facts - facts we can trust

Having a future vision

Along with the facts our farmer had a vision
Risk - or faith - is all about the future – what will happen - if or if not

The farmer casting his seed into the rough ploughed land

It is the future hope which has inspired faith and progress throughout the years

Like Paul – who would have loved the Olympic Games – and national marathons
I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. I run straight towards the goal / the winning line. (Phil3.12)

Like Jesus who
Because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross and is now seated at the right hand side of God's throne. (Hebrews 12.2)

Just as the Kingdom vision has been the inspiration of missions and philanthropic works in every Christian generation

Knowing the Creator

There is one other thing I would hope inspired the farmer's vision – and ours!

He did not know how the harvest came but he believed
because he had a friendship with God who did!!

The basis of true faith is having a PERSON to know and trust
God gave us himself in Jesus
as that person
for that very reason
Jesus is the first born Son superior to all created things. Through him God created everything.
(Colossians 1)

He is creator
– the engineer who knows the works inside out
for the whole universe – and every intricate working of my body, mind and spirit!!

I can now know him who is God
Creator
Unchanging
Faithful
Just
True
Loving
AND I can trust him – he has never failed!

For the Church and the Kingdom

We can trust for the Church – and the Kingdom of God's love

by remembering whose Kingdom it is;
Keeping his glorious end in sight;
Staying close and taking positive risks with him at the centre
Sowing the kingdom seed by life-goodness, praise and prayer
And, trusting him, being prepared to take positive risks for him

- taking the risk of being different
- unpopular – misunderstood
- taking the risk of new expressions of faith and worship

Faith Assessment

If we had a form to fill in for that assessment, it would have these questions:

Can you drop a kingdom seed of God's love into the daily life of your world – and leave it there – believing it will bear fruit?

Can you put your life into God's hands and leave it there, confident that he who is your creator and saviour will enrich your life with purpose and vision?

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Year B Ordinary 12

Mark 4. 35 - 41

Abandoned

Mark 4.38 and 41 *Teacher, don't you care..? Who is this man?*

Abandoned

Mark 4.38 and 41 *Teacher, don't you care..? Who is this man?*

A perennial question

There is a perennial question at the heart of the story of Jesus calming the waters of Galilee
- perhaps the most asked question in pastoral encounters

Doesn't God care?

Paul asked it on the railway station late one evening

As the guard's whistle sounded along the platform and the train doors moved slowly towards each other, Paul wanted to call out from deep inside himself, 'God! Don't you care? What shall I do?

.....

He had already let several trains go, without getting aboard. Hardly noticing the crowd moving on and off with every opening and closing of the doors, he had wandered in a daze, backwards and forwards the length of the platform like a drunken man. That was precisely how many had seen him. Some were obviously annoyed when he was in their way, walking against the hurried stream, suddenly standing still or changing direction. Trapped in the tight world of his own mind, Paul was oblivious to loud sighs and abusive mutters.

"How can I go home?" The question consumed him and kept him standing on the platform while trains left without him. 'How can I tell Margaret?'

The news had been an unexpected blow that morning. In the boss's office he had learned that the job he had held for thirty-two years was no longer his. How quickly a man's world can fall apart. How was a man his age going to start again? Retrain? What for? Where? How? Thankfully the children were independent now..... only a few years left with the mortgage..... but Margaret was unable to work now..... what about pensions?

Again and again he had broken into a cold sweat at the thought of signing on the neighbours' questions Margaret having to share the burden the holidays they had planned ... time together grandchildren all overshadowed by an irrational sense of disgrace ..

He had sat down on a bench, head in hands.

'You all right mate?'

He lifted his head to gaze into the unkempt, bearded face of a station vagrant. He stood up, quickly, and walked again. Would that be him some day?

Paul knew his thoughts were not making sense. Of course Margaret would support him as she always did. Even now she would be worrying about him being late. They had weathered crises together before – her own illness, the loss of their child, hardships and unfulfilled dreams ...

She would be disappointed. There would be tears, but

Margaret had her faith, of course. Paul was not so sure. He survived on Margaret's faith.

But now his fears swamped his thoughts dragging any certainty into a dark chasm of doubt.

'I can't go home.' But where else?'

Paul took a step towards the closing doors 'God! Don't you care?'

To a greater or less degree, not many people by-pass that feeling of being abandoned at some time in life,

abandoned by others,

abandoned by God

Where are you God? Don't you care? Why don't you ...'

Maybe its a domestic or social problem without an obvious answer;

A hurt that won't heal – and every conversation, every action opens up the wound

An unanswered prayer which has been said a thousand times and maybe by a thousand people

The helplessness of a long slow illness, or the growing dependency associated with ageing

A temptation that keeps niggling and will not go away

A sense of depression about a sick world – a world of changed social and moral standards

War – children dying while national leaders play politics – women enslaved

Greed, holding back the advances we would make for peace, justice, truth

All the innocent, undeserved suffering

Why God, Why?

All those experiences may be like being in a violent storm

- and God is sleeping! *God! Don't you care?*

Another Question

But there is another question.

It is on the lips of the same disciples, standing, or is it kneeling, in the motionless boat on a millpond lake, too dazed and awestruck to realise that they now have to row to the shore because there's no wind for the sail!

Who is this? they ask - Even the elements are in his control!

If they could have asked that question first,

maybe they would not have wanted to ask *Don't you care?*

When I am asked that '*Why doesn't God...?*' question

I want to ask the other question first. *Who is this man Jesus?*

The lake experience was an early stage in the disciples' discovery of who Jesus was.

They would see many more miracles

hear much more teaching yet.

They would see him suffering on a cross

- suffering for and alongside every single person who cries out *Don't you care?*

They would wonder at his resurrection and ascension

and his power at work through the Holy Spirit

.. before they could say for sure

*Who is he? **He is GOD!***

Lord of creation;

controller of the universe - of calm and of tempest

able to breathe a healing peace into every human situation

- *personal*

- *national*

- *world-wide.*

The Question changes everything

Ask the second question first and everything changes

Natural fear becomes a holy fear

- a sense of awe and wonder -close to the divine presence

The feeling of being abandoned by God,

becomes a desire to abandon life,

the questions, the pains, the joys, the unanswered dilemma ..

and to surrender it all to God

It was this that Jesus is teaching them when between their questions, he asks them a question

Why are you frightened? What happened to your faith?

Evelyn Underhill used the same idea when she described faith in terms of a bird abandoning itself to the air. The air supports it all around, but the bird is so created that the air enters into its bones. So God in Christ lives with us and in us - and we know that he has made us for himself and our hearts can find rest in him alone.

'God! Don't you care? What shall I do?

The train doors closed, leaving Paul on the platform yet again. It wasn't that his courage had failed him this time. As though in answer to his prayer, his eye caught sight of a poster on the far platform. He must have walked past it countless times - they don't change the advertisements on the station that often. The picture was of a woman smiling across at him. It was nothing like Margaret, but his mind substituted the picture. The smile. That's how she always welcomed him. It was a contented look. Yes, you could call it a trusting, unflappable look.

It is said that all one's life passes before a drowning person, but for Paul it flashed through the mind of a man coming up for air. Suddenly there was chink of light in the gloom of his despair. All those times he and Margaret had faced together, and what was it she said. 'We'll have to leave it in God's hands. It's safe there!'

Paul had never been sure. Margaret had said it for both of them, but now he felt he wanted to make the same step. In a way it seemed as irrational as his fears. It was like an abandonment - handing everything over - an adventure even!

Could there be new beginnings? Paul's gloom turned to light mist as he journeyed home on the next train holding in his mind a picture of a trusting smile.

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Year B Ordinary 13

Mark 5. 21 - 43

Where's the Church?

Mark 5. 24 They were crowding Jesus from every side

Where's the Church ?

Mark 5. 24 They were crowding Jesus from every side

Where's the Church ?

Where's the church ?

You will know the children's picture puzzles where line drawings are superimposed on each other and you are asked to find hidden objects in the picture

Under a picture of the familiar story of Jairus and his daughter, and other events that day; I would like to put the caption - 'Find the Church!'

Where's the Church?

On reading the passage we will immediately say - 'there's no mention of 'church'!

Are we sure what we are looking for?

a building? do you mean Jairus' synagogue?

A company of people? are you speaking of Jesus' disciples?

Where is Jesus ?

From the days of the New Testament the church is called 'the body of Christ'

Paul writing to the Christians at Ephesus. 1.23 The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere.'

We have this picture of every believer - reconciled to God
by the power of Jesus' life-giving sacrifice
and filled with the Holy Spirit
enabling Jesus to continue his saving and healing kingdom ministry
THROUGH US HIS PEOPLE
until the work is complete - and all the world honour him

So if we want to find the Church in this picture from the Gospel,
we need to look for Jesus

Ask not 'where's the church?'

Ask 'Where's Jesus?'

because it is there we will see the church at work

There is our pattern for being church

Where is Jesus ?

So 'where is Jesus ?'

The simplest answer is 'OUT THERE'

Out there in the town

At the lakeside

In the crowds

In the sick room

Of course he could be found at times in the synagogue,
Just as he could be found in the Temple when he was in Jerusalem
He accepted the importance of the place
of worship, teaching and fellowship

Looking at this in more detail we can identify four areas where Jesus is to be found
OUT THERE

Available and touchable

You will find him close to people

listening to a desperate, distraught father - kneeling, with pride thrown to the winds
- wanting to believe
- jostled by the people hurrying him along
- but not so fast he cannot have time to notice a sick woman's touch

He has time - that important commodity few people realize they have and even fewer know how to use]

See Jesus in the house of pain
- broken with their hurt
- giving hope even at the far end of the parent's despair
And neighbours' disbelief

Here we can see the meaning of God's Incarnation - In Jesus - God with us
- God alongside us - with time for us
God becoming available
- within reach of the feeblest outstretched hand

Foot washing - doing the little things

But it isn't just in the realm of empathy - feeling with us
There is an intensely practical side to Jesus' ministry - to Incarnation

See him encouraging Jairus - *Let's go together!*

And that beautiful touch - when, holding a little girl's hand as she returns to health, he says - *'get her something to eat then.'*

As when confronted by sea of people who had been listening and waiting for his help all day - *'they must be getting hungry. Let's feed them !'*

Or in an upper room looking at the tired and dusty feet of his men he took taking a bowl and towel.....

Resolute against opposition

But then look again.
Jesus is not just the soft touch.

At Jairus' place he is confronted by the wailers and their knowledgeable judgments - *'she's dead'*.
He puts them out, stating clearly. *She is not dead.* He dismisses them, and encourages the parents' faith

There is something of the strength of divine judgment in his words and actions
These people were reckoning without God in their midst!

Fellowship on the hoof

Our fourth picture of Jesus is with his closest disciples, Jairus and 'Mrs. Jairus', praying together behind the closed door of the sick room.

It is a picture of 'fellowship on the hoof' - praying on the job
Fellowship created at the point of need

So there is the Church - OUT THERE
- the incarnate body of Christ
Touching and available
Foot-washing with a care for the little things
Resilient in faith against all opposition - unashamed to believe - to be different
Finding fellowship at the point of need

And that is us ! The Church in our community!
The Body of Christ - Out There!

*In the eleventh century a remarkable man became Bishop of Worcester
Wulstan was a renowned preacher and pastor
Known as the Bishop of the Market Place
He turned no-one from his door - always being available and accessible
Some of his people criticized him saying he was always troubled by people
To which he replied 'That's why I'm here!'*

Here is the Church

These may be difficult times for the church
Time to ask questions about its life and ministry

The first question is the one we have been asking
- **where is the church ?**

A visitor would usually look for obvious features
a spire or tower - a church shaped structure - even a cross on the roof
Mostly the building will be obvious - and its use necessary for its function

But the real church should be just as obvious!

*Could a visitor spend a week in our community and discover the body of Christ - his Church
- in the people they meet and the stories they hear?*