

## Ordinary 23 to Ordinary 26

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Year B Ordinary 23

Mark 7: 24 - 37

### Jesus' Priorities

Mark 7: 29 Because of that answer .....

We know that two people may witness the same event and give quite different accounts of what happened. Much depends on their viewpoint and maybe their prejudices! More of a problem too if they have the story second-hand.

All that may account for Matthew and Mark giving rather different versions of this story of Jesus healing the daughter of a woman in a village to the N West of Galilee, somewhere near. It is highly likely that neither was present at the time.

The Syro-Phoenician woman's story heard from Matthew's version (Matthew 15.21-28) is somewhat difficult to understand and even contradictory of our common picture of Jesus. He tells us that Jesus did not speak to the woman which was not unexpected by a non-Jewish woman although it contrasts with Jesus and a Samaritan woman in John 4. Then the words *'I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel.... It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs .....*' !

There are undertones of conflict here in three distinct areas of difference

- Jew and Gentile (religious)
- male and female (sexual)
- Jew and Canaanite (racial)

Mark's account, which is most likely to have been Peter's story originally, plus a little imagination gives a different picture:

Perhaps Jesus was alone in his visit to the area around Tyre - no disciples are mentioned. Was he staying incognito in the house? Mark's story suggests that could be the case. But his identity could not be kept secret and this woman knocked on his door. Was that pre-arranged? Was she and her daughter actually the purpose of his visit? Who would understand?

The woman was distraught, emotionally tortured by her daughter's mental illness (I think we would understand it that way now knowing how much mental illness is still stigmatised for the sufferers and their families).

The conversation with Jesus seems to me to be a sort of 'banter' in which Jesus creates a relationship of trust, confidence, hope, calming fears and breaking down social, religious and racial barriers.

*'Don't they say feed the children first?'*

meaning in God's plan don't the Jews have first call on his help?

The woman's reply returns the banter and accepts the differences between them *'-but even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers'*

And on this occasion, the relationship Jesus builds between her and himself enables a faith-miracle.

***So the important truth in this story is;***

to see Jesus as real - a man, a Jew, a person of his time .... and divine!

to learn ***his priorities:***

First for him are

NOT the differences of race, of religion, of social status

But human suffering and need

Living in Christ, his priorities become ours:

1. accepting the relationship with God which he offers to us

- a relationship of faith-friendship as the basis of fulfilling his will and living and working out his Kingdom.

2. learning, in a world torn apart by religious discord, racism and cultural, domestic, health difference, that unity and peace comes through shared friendship with God in Jesus in which human need and compassion become our priority

The apostle Paul discovered: *In union with Christ ... there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3.28)*

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**Year B Ordinary 24**

*Mark 8: 27 - 38*

**Follow this way?**

*Mark 8.34 Jesus said: If anyone want to come with me .....*

A common experience when country walking is when one member of the party imagines he or she knows - a quicker route - an easier way -to miss the crowds - to save time - to get a more panoramic view - only to discover when we are lost, wading through deep mud, or cut off by a fast flowing stream, that the given directions were right and best.

Jesus had reached a critical stage in his ministry.

It was time to make the Jerusalem journey which would culminate in his passion, death and resurrection.

It was time to make it clear to his followers - the twelve and others - what was involved.

*'You believe that I am Messiah (Christ is a title not a name) the chosen one. But you have to know that as Messiah - God's Saviour - I have to suffer much - I have to be rejected by 'the religious' who will kill me - BUT three days after that I will rise to life again!'*

He had made it too clear for Peter

for him Jesus meant success - truth - satisfied crowds - healing

- the vision of a whole new world of justice, peace, truth

- the Kingdom of God on earth

*That can't be right! Not for you Lord! Not that way!*

Jesus had heard that before - when the devil tempted him at the beginning of his ministry.  
*Turn stones into bread - impress the crowds with divine power and spectacular works ..*

'NO Peter' he said. *'You're speaking of man-made mission - I'm calling you to God's work ..*

*We are still tempted to man-mission .....*

Jesus then went on to tell Peter and all who had come to listen to him,  
what following really means .....

*'My followers MUST*

1. forget self
2. carry their cross - *accept the hardship, disciplines, heartaches, rejections of discipleship*
3. follow - and **keep following** *all the way to the Cross and Resurrection*  
*- to share his glory and the life and work of his Kingdom*
4. take a faith risk be prepared to lose life for Christ and the Gospel  
*the alternative is to win the world and lose your soul*

MUST There is no question. This is essential discipleship

It would even appear impossible

**but for the fact** that they had just responded to Jesus' Challenge

*Who do you say I am?*

*Who am I to you?*

which is why he concludes here with a note of warning

*'If a person is ashamed of me and my teaching ... the Son of Man will be ashamed of him ...'*

If we are totally committed to Jesus

If we, with faith, can respond *'You are the Christ. the Son of God. - You are Christ for me.'*

Then our faith relationship and our unashamed witness follow naturally

*Romans 10.9*

*If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved.*

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**Year B Ordinary 25**

Mark 9: 30 - 37

**Pick up a child Jesus' Priorities [God's Little Horrors !]**

Mark 9 : 37 *Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me...welcomes the one who sent me*

**At a low ebb**

It was not all success for the first followers of Jesus

- not all the glory of teaching, healing, miracles and demonstrations of the power of God over evil

Earlier in this chapter are  
a whole lot of moments which are like black and white photographs compared to the colourful excitement prints of Jesus' ministry

Like this one

Peter James and John witness the mountain top experience of Jesus' transfiguration

- bewildered - incredulous - they respond with

'let's build shrines for Moses and Elijah and you, Lord !'

While the other disciples waiting at the foot of the mountain experience

- failure of faith - failure in healing / answering a need / working for Jesus

- failure in debate with the religious leaders - conscious of lack of learning and experience

- failure in prayer - as Jesus explains later

And these lead to an argument about greatness - hierarchy - position and power

and they know they've got it wrong again

when Jesus picks up a little child and stands him among these 'big' men

to illustrate that faith and life in God is a child-like thing!!

Learn to live with the faith of a child - and you will have your heart open to God

Learn to live with the faith of a child - and you will be able to understand God

Learn to live with the faith of a child - and you will know how to live the way of Christ

Learn to live with the faith of a child - and you will be ready to receive anyone and everyone in Christ's name !

Children don't come in neat packages;

don't always follow the instructions;

are not predictable

A child has different concept of values -

*try asking a young child Child - what do you want for your birthday!*

As in our understanding of God's kingdom, the Church - our mission and witness -

we, like the first disciples, would like it all tidied up in neat rows and packages

clearly defined membership

clearly delineated positions - everyone in their place

clear strategies for mission

clear forms of worship

But God doesn't work like that - he is full of surprises - of new things - of new opportunities

- of a million different ways of dealing with billions of different people

### **Pick up a child !**

So what does Jesus mean by 'receiving a child'

### ***Forgiving***

The child runs in - full of trouble - having been disobedient - grubby and in an awfully untidy state

- and you pick him up

Maybe chastising - tell him how cross you are - but also forgiving

### ***Loving***

And loving - however grubby - however much of a little horror - still pick him up and give him a hug !

still have faith and believe the best about and for her  
still cherish hope for her future

and that goes on however old the child !

Whatever she has got up to - you'll go on caring - providing - giving - picking her up with love

### ***Living***

And go on living for them and with them

- being at their level - not talking down - but getting down to them whatever it cost

### **Our relationship**

And that's our relationship to God and to others

- when we are receiving, just like welcoming children

Opening our arms and lives to God and all his love

Opening our arms to ALL people

- not being exclusive with our gospel

or our Christian life

### **God with us**

It's important because that's how God is with us !

He receives us 'little horrors'

with our mistakes in life

with our mistaken understanding of him

with our failures in faith and prayer and witness

### **The Way of the Kingdom**

Jesus says if you want to learn the revolutionary - world-changing way of the Kingdom

- the sure joy of living in Christ

remember how God picked us up

and learn to live as those who receive the children

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Year B Ordinary 26

Mark 9: 35 - 50

## Babes and Sinners First

Mark 9.41 Because you belong to me

### Sorting Priorities

*George had what he called his Lazarus experience. He found it difficult to describe. He said it was like being in another place. Following complicated surgery he had died - and then recovered. From that time he claimed that his attitude to life could never be the same.*

Others have experienced the same and have established a different set of priorities for their lives. Life is now soaked in gratitude, contentment, peace, trust .....

The apostle Paul said that becoming a Christian is like having a *Lazarus experience* - dying and rising with Christ.  
(Romans 6)

That is the Christian experience of conversion

- to meet Jesus - in person - in his words - in an act of trust
- to respond to his invitation to new eternal life
- to be born again in his Spirit

### ***And the priorities change***

It was how Jesus' first disciples knew it

On a retreat with him, they had seen Jesus transfigured man and God united in one person - indescribable glory!  
And their thinking and life-style had changed

No doubt during the rest of that retreat they learned to feel at home with religious discussion and controversy  
Maybe led by Nathaniel, they entered into some vigorous debates

This excerpt from Mark's gospel covers some of their thoughts and discussions

- as they talked they bounced ideas off one another - one idea sparking another until they had several topics under discussion at the same time

## **Many themes**

1. They had begun with the question;  
*Who is the greatest - most important*  
Jesus had been speaking of leaving them - of his death.  
They did not understand,  
but if it was true, who would be their leader in Jesus' place? Who was greatest?

*The question for us today may be about which ministry  
- which spiritual gifts rank highest*

2. This led on to them asking who is a true disciple?  
*We saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him - he's not one of us!*

*The question for today may be about denominations - perhaps about religions?  
About who's interpretation of the scriptures is most valid*

3. Then they got on to heaven and hell!  
*Jesus talking about it being better to get to heaven with one eye than to hell with both - that is if the eye is your cause of offence*

I can imagine some who may have listened saying  
*Is heaven then full of people with one eye and one hand or foot, or ear  
Missing the point as we and others have done since*

*Evading the issues of death - judgment - eternal life - 'what next?' as we often do today*

## **Priorities**

All through their talking, arguing, questions  
Jesus is saying to them  
*Let's sort out the priorities*

*Yes, it's good to explore the mysteries of life and faith  
To discuss spiritual matters  
To search the mind of the Father  
To read the scriptures more carefully and deeply  
To look seriously at our questions and our doubts  
- which must be faced honestly and openly*

**BUT**

*Let's not lose sight of what really matters*

## **A Child first**

In the middle of all this questioning, Jesus had taken a child  
- imagine a little boy or girl - inquisitive - joining the group  
- he welcomes the child who sits close to him and he says

*If you really want to know who is the greatest  
- the greatest must be like this child  
With simplicity and trust*

**And with a sense of belonging**

## **Belonging to Christ**

is the heart of all Christian life

- the place where all our questions either find an answer,  
or make an answer unnecessary.

- belonging to Christ - to God in and through Jesus

A deep personal and intimate relationship

Of friendship with the Lord of life, the Saviour of the world

Life lived in harmony with God

- surrendered and belonging

Jesus says

Whatever other points you raise

Whatever questions you have to discuss

- keep coming back to this

Never lose sight of the relationship

God has made us for friendship with himself

Sin breaks that relationship

In Jesus God restores it, through his self sacrifice

- the Cross and our trust in him

Now, in Christ we have a **belonging** that is for ever

## **Let Nothing Spoil the Belonging**

Jesus said, *'you belong to me. Let nothing spoil it.'*

He uses figures of speech to make his point

And if they are dramatic it only proves how serious he knew it to be

*If your hand causes you to do things which mar the relationship  
and put you in danger of losing your hold on Christ  
Get rid of it!!*

It was his way of saying

**'It's that important!'**

Let nothing spoil your belonging to Christ