

## Mark 7: 1-8, 14-23

So many troubles in our world: Haiti, Afghanistan, and the Pandemic feels threatening. So where do we stand in relation to hope in God?

Recent gospel readings have drawn heavily on metaphor. Jesus knew human frailties and weakness when it comes to learning. He spoke often in terms of agricultural images, lost sheep, seed sown. He used domestic images: leaven to make dough rise, light on the lamp stand, sweeping in searching of a lost coin. There are also personal images a lost son returning to a father immortalized in Rembrandt's wonderful painting. Not much wonder then that Jesus used such a simple explanation of what defiles a person. Not the waste that goes into the sewer but what we harbour in our heart. Jesus made his comment in the context of a community that focused 613 rules for ritual purity. True to form, Jesus came to turn shake up the world view of Jewish law-enforcers. On more than one occasion he said he had not come to abolish the law. His aim was to end the hypocrisy of religious leaders who enforced laws that caused hardship.

I have a question for you; what does Jesus' statement tell you about the nature of God? Now I digress for a moment.

I've learnt a few things since I began my theological study. One is that I need to let go of what I thought I knew about God. As a cradle Anglican my learnings began in Sunday school. I knew the stories. What I learnt studying theology was that sacred text was always written for a specific purpose and with an audience in mind. Who would have thought? As a teacher VCE English, I had been demonstrating audience and purpose to students for years. But I can remember the moment when my certainty about scripture was taken away.

I was reading a subject called Introduction to Old Testament with the distinguished Jesuit scholar Anthony Campbell. For weeks he had been dissecting texts before our eyes. Everything I thought I knew

was slipping away. I had one image in my mind. Have you ever seeing a trick where a tablecloth is whipped from under crockery that lifts then somehow lands again? My tablecloth was being whipped away. The moment came when I could endure the text dismantling no more. I put my hand up. The words that came were: “everything I knew is gone; what is left”? Campbell replied: “This is text. If you have come to find out about God, you have come to the wrong place”. So began my real learning. Texts give us stories and images and are written by evangelists who invite us to experience growth **in the Holy Spirit**.

This is how scripture becomes dynamic. Things happen in us when we let go, let be and let grow according to the model I introduced you to some weeks back. We have to be ready for self-examination and change. But you know, letting go is not easy. We need the mainstay of intellectual structures that enable us to create meaning. You all come from different academic backgrounds and professional experience and naturally you see the world and your church through your particular lens. I have a question for you; are you called to move from your comfort zone?

Jesus’ use of metaphor is an important guide. In gospels of recent weeks Jesus has spoken of himself as the living bread. Jesus is not calling us to literalism. I cringed this week to hear a NSW pastor declare the lockdown is ended in Jesus’ name. No, it isn’t. We are called to the **hard place of living** between the scientific fact of the spread of the virus, and hope in God. We are invited to commune with God via the bread of life so that we may truly live. We are invited to open our minds and hearts to be adventurous, to embrace unconventional **higher and deeper forms of understanding**. What might these be? What creativity might emerge from learning beyond prohibitions on what makes **us** ritually clean? Here is a metaphor for our time. Jesus meant to introduce us to deep hidden dimensions of reality and the most fruitful way to do that is to stretch conventional

words **in unconventional directions**. Jesus spoke in parable to poetically prod and push and provoke. Today's gospel takes us in that direction.

This week, Parish Council continued its examination of Sam Wells book *A Future Bigger Than The Past*. Exciting because it also prods. It asks readers to see church as **dynamic experience that rests in The Spirit**. Scary because it begs the question. Are we doing the right things? What should we let go of? What creative opportunity is in front of us? Christopher asked the Zoom participants to reflect on what Parish Council experience meant to each of them. I heard honest appraisal and I noted that members of the group need each other to live into The Kingdom. This is exactly what Jesus called people to. **There is wisdom in spirit-living** but there is no guarantee that the work is simple or easy. We are facing deep uncertainty during this lock-down; most can't actually reach out hands for the bread of heaven. We are challenged more than ever, to seek intimacy with God when we can't take Communion. What we are called to is to open our mind to **communion with the heavenly mystery**. Can we let the word abide in us? Can we open our heart to deep-living in The Spirit?

There is no escape from the personal call. Jesus urges us to look into **our heart** to see what resides there. We have to make a decision about our ideas on the nature of God. Do we believe we known, held, and encouraged by a God that is bigger than rules? Wells tells us that the church must be a place of humility. It is not about having all the answers it is about being in a place of tension between the macro and micro. It is a place of **creativity and imagination**. What a joy that we actually need each other to unpack and understand our experience of that dynamic.

Thanks be to God.

Reference

Rev'd Sam Wells, *A Future That's Bigger Than The Past* Catalysing  
Kingdom Communities Canterbury Press London 2019

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