

Mark 7: 24-37 He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

I've struggled this week like no other about where I would allow the Spirit to lead me as I shaped my words. My brief was to give some context to your Mission Action Statement. In today's gospel we hear of Jesus' healing; 'he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak' Can we accept this healing power? I am going allow myself to speak a truth that may well be unpopular. Now I dislike conflict, so I have to reflect on times when Jesus faced opposition. In Luke 4: 29-30 Jesus was taken to the edge of a cliff to be thrown off because of his teaching. He eventually walked through the crowd. A second example I think of is the people surrounding the woman caught in adultery. Jesus said to those gathered; "those among you without sin can cast the first stone". The crowd dispersed. Sometimes it is not easy to challenge and disappoint.

Hold that thought. This week you have been emailed the proposed the Mission Action Plan. I knew that before I could make any comment, I needed to be aware of the process your representatives worked through to produce it. So I read Ken Morgan's book *Pathways in Ministry*¹. I know that many hours have gone into bringing the document to fruition. This community honours that hard work.

Now I have heard a thing or two in relation to mission statements and action plans over the years. I recall a leadership guru saying that we might just as well skin a cat and pin the skin to the wall for all the use that a mission statement is. Provocative, but I think I understand what he was saying. Mission documents need to be lived.

¹ Ken Morgan Pathways In Ministry Passim

As I ploughed my way through Ken Morgan's book, I found myself becoming increasingly anxious. I've concluded that is because I find Morgan's stepped process of discipling people quite threatening. I fear failure and I know I don't have the necessary skills to follow his plan. This is my personal baggage, and I mustn't contaminate this community with my limitations. This is where I need to turn to Sam Wells's vision that *The Church That Has A Future Bigger Than Its Past*.

Ken Morgan suggests myriad ways of inviting people into the church community so that they become enculturated. This is what Wells says of his approach: "Becoming a blessing is an apt summary of this book. For what I am advocating is not so much a series of activities let alone techniques, but more a state of mind."²

In the few weeks I've preached here, you've heard me emphasise that we are all different. Our psychological types vary, and last week I said that you each view your church through a personal lens. This is what makes consensus difficult when it comes to deciding on a Mission Action Plan. The options laid out for you in the document to rank according to your preference are exciting. Once your voice is noted, you will be ready on Keren's return, to launch into action.

That said, I want to make some observations as an outsider inspired by Sam Wells. The Pathways Project options put before you this week are focused on the environment. I have to ask are there other voices precluded by this vision? This is a rhetorical question. There are other possibilities.

I want to affirm the range of gifts that you have in this parish. I can see those who are detail minded, I see those who can cut through, I can see the creative, I see the technically skilled, I see the generous, I see pastorally minded people with passion and energy. Each of the qualities becomes **dynamic** as it is broadened or balanced with other giftedness. Last week I concluded my comments by saying **that we**

² Sam Wells, *A Future Bigger Than Its Past* p 158

need each other in order to become the Kingdom. It is not necessary to say yes or no to an environmental project. To make this an either or approach. It is possible to say yes, and embrace another project as well.

This is why I find Well's approach so uplifting when we don't know what to choose or what to do. Wells tells us we are not alone; God is in the midst of our difficulties and decision making. For instance this is what Sam Wells say about facing Pandemic. God "doesn't abandon us and we shouldn't find it all so hard. When it comes to the abyss of despair we should sit there because this is the place of call".³

Wells says the church is the body of Christ and during difficulties it will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He says we must live together under God. God is more present in exile and at horrific times like the crucifixion. If we were to say God is not here, we have to ask; what are we really looking for? God is with us now and our hearts need to be reshaped. The work is in us!

God says I am with you like never before. How do we hear this voice? Prayer is the answer. This is the way that God draws us into the heart of the Trinity. When we pray we allow the essence to saturate us. Wells makes the distinction between existence and essence. Existence is for a limited time essence is for ever.

So looking at the alternatives set out in your plan, some may feel inspired to make a contribution other than an environmental path. My aim is not to be divisive here. It is to be inclusive. What is the invitation offered by Wells? What skills and passions do you have that might engage others? Is it dance, meditation, writing, singing and music making, painting and drawing or stitching? What can you do to the glory of God? Our individual offering comes according to age and experience.

³³ Sam Wells on-line lectures for the Diocese of Brisbane 2020

Wells tells us that it is state of mind that is vital. He urges us to become a blessing which “is no more than growing more faithful in more ways, and helping others to do so; seeing green shoots of *creativity* and possibility, here and elsewhere, and fostering their development into maturity; and getting right the ways of living and working together, which brings out the best in everyone and making the community more than the sum of its parts and walking with other communities as they seek to do the same.”

Let us bless and love one another.

AMEN

References

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