

Trust in God

Psalm 46

Mark ch6 v1-13

In 2001, The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland published The Church Without walls initiative, In the report, it restates the primary purpose of the Church. Which is? – Let’s just remind ourselves – “To follow Jesus Christ. We are his people, travelling where he leads us.” Easy, eh? - If only. We still have that challenge today and should consider those words as we face the challenge of ministerial and financial constraints and shortages.

When Jesus came to Nazareth, he put himself to a very severe test. He was coming to his hometown. There are no severer critics of any man than those who have known him since his boyhood.

It was never meant to be a private visit simply to see his old home and his own people. He came attended by his disciples. That is, he came as a Rabbi. In those days, Rabbi’s moved about the country accompanied by their little circle of disciples, and it was as a teacher, with his disciples, that Jesus came.

The old football cliché, “it was a game of two halves,” could apply to our reading today. The reading splits into two halves. First, we hear of those who can’t manage to relate to Jesus.

You know, how can this local lad, this carpenter, this very ordinary human being be anything special? There’s a wee touch of “I kent his faither,” about it.

And then we hear of Jesus’ disciples – people who know Jesus very well indeed, men and perhaps women – who have seen him take bread night after night and break it, giving thanks in his own unique and inimitable way, people who trust Jesus enough to go out to share his vision, to share him with others. Do you know, groups with these viewpoints, are still around today?

The ones who refused to listen had two reasons. They said, “Is this not the carpenter?”

You can almost hear the word carpenter being spat out in derision. Jesus was a carpenter, but scholars will say that the Greek means more than a plain carpenter.

It means, in this case, a skilled craftsman. Jesus could therefore turn his hand to any job. He was top of his profession. The point is that the

people despised Jesus because he was a working man. He was a man of the people, a layman, an ordinary man – and therefore they despised him.

William Barclay recounts the story of Will Crooks, who was one of the leaders of the Labour movement.

One of Will Crooks earliest recollections was seeing his mother crying because she had no idea where the next meal was to come from. He became a fine craftsman, a blacksmith to trade.

He entered municipal politics and became the first Labour Mayor of any London borough. Some people were offended. One day one of those people, a lady voiced her disgust by saying, “They’ve made that common fellow Crooks, Mayor, and he’s no better than a working man.”

A man in the crowd, Will Crooks himself turned around and said to her, “Quite right madam. I am not better than a working man.”

The people of Nazareth despised Jesus because he was a working man. To us that is his glory, because it means that God, when he came to earth, claimed no exemptions.

He took upon himself the common life with all its problems and day to day tasks.

You see, for some, the gospel of Jesus is outrageous, too easy, too simple and too ordinary.

The temptation is to dress it up, to intellectualise, and to complicate it. Jesus comes to make community – to be open to all – to bring us together with one another, and with God:

“Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

The whole language affronts many.

It led to the cross then – and it leads to polite disdain now: “Who is this to forgive sins?” And that question begs another: “Have I really any sin to be forgiven?” You know, “We live good upright lives, we’re kind to people, surely we don’t really need to take all this stuff about sin seriously?” If that is so, then grace must come pretty cheaply.

Jesus’ Gospel is about sharing God’s love very simply in the deep recognition of our need for forgiveness. We have to share forgiveness to be a community – and that means we have to recognise our sin.

It also means if we want to be effective in the community, we have to take responsibility for the sins and needs of the community.

They couldn’t take Jesus or his offers of help. So, God, in Jesus, had to go away quietly grieving.

Only a few people were able to have the benefit of his love and healing touch. He wasn't able to work among them as he wished.

It says in verse 6, "He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith."

Thankfully there are others who dare to believe that this Jesus really is God, really is King Jesus. Let's consider this for a moment. What does this phrase mean? What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord? Well, when our Queen was a child, her parents held a garden party at Buckingham Palace.

A rainstorm forced the guests indoors. Elizabeth and Margaret wandered into the room where the guests had gathered and were politely bombarded with questions.

During a pause in the conversations, Elizabeth pointed toward a nearby wall and a painting of Jesus on the cross. She remarked, "that's the man my papa says is really king."

What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord?

It means that the whole point and purpose in our lives, the whole inner core of our day-to-day existence is bound up with and in Jesus.

To say that Jesus is Lord, is to open our whole being to Jesus, to go to him again and again, recognising more and more deeply our failure, our frailty, our foolishness – but to come away healed, renewed, invigorated, joyful.

If we are to take up the initiative of the challenges facing the Church today, I think what it means in the context of today's reading is, that to go forward with Jesus as a faith community, it may be necessary for us to look at the way we as individuals and as a congregation do things. There also may be a time of repentance individually and collectively before we move ahead.

I see this as an exciting time. One that will bring us closer to God, fill our hearts with a deeper love for him and each other. We will be filled with a sense of expectancy in all areas of our church life. Listen to what Willie Barclay has to say. "In an atmosphere of expectancy, the poorest sermon can catch fire. In an atmosphere of critical coldness or bland indifference, the most Spirit packed utterance can fall lifeless to the earth. There can be no peace making in the wrong atmosphere.

If people have come together to hate, they will hate. If people have come together to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other. But if people have come together, loving Christ and seeking to

love each other, even those who are most widely separated can come together in Him.

There is laid on us, the tremendous responsibility that we can either help or hinder the work of Jesus Christ. We can open the door wide to Him – or we can slam it in His face.”

These words were written 60 years ago. They are as true today as they were then. Maybe some of us are saying to ourselves, well, we’re doing not too badly.

Which to a point, is correct. But that doesn’t mean that we should become complacent. We have to examine ourselves and our motives constantly in the light of our Saviour.

Some may be saying, “easier said than done.

But the Christian life really isn’t hard to live, - it’s impossible! In fact, only one person in history has actually lived it perfectly – Jesus Christ. All is not lost, however! When Jesus returned to his Father in heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit to help us live our lives the way that God intended. A church bulletin captured this reality in this prayer I’m about to read out.

It goes like this. “So far today, Lord, I’ve done alright.

I haven’t gossiped; I haven’t lost my temper; I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent. I’m very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, Lord, I’m going to get out of bed.

And from then on, I’m going to need a lot of help.” The good news is we have God’s help. We have the Holy Spirit.

To live “Jesus is Lord” is to begin to live as Jesus lives; to be people who share healing, joy, peace, encouragement – and judgement and forgiveness. To live “Jesus is Lord” is to run the risk of being asked, as Jesus was asked: “Who do you think you are?”

To which the answer has to be: “No-one much, but a child of God, a sister and brother of Jesus.”

Dangerous stuff, and safe only if we hold on to the whole gospel and recognise that Jesus is Lord because of the Cross. A stumbling block to many.

But it is in the cross that we find the answer to our problems.

It is because of the cross that people and communities are transformed, as, in Jesus’ name, we go out into the community, in our place of work, recreation and by prayer,

- Not as lords, but because of our Lord and his love which is for all.

Amen