



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 5 September 2021

Pentecost 15

Harvest Celebration

In two encounters in the Gospel reading today Jesus offers us a pattern for engaging with others. How we act, approach and respond to the people around us demonstrates our faith more powerfully than our words can.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"He took him aside in private, away from the crowd."

Mark 7:33

An Illustration to set the scene

It became fashionable in Christian circles, some years ago, to wear a plastic bracelet with the initials "WWJD" on it.

The letters stood for "What Would Jesus Do?" and offered the wearer an opportunity, in any circumstance, to consider their own actions in the light of that question.

This was a popular and well-meaning question – prompting Christians to think of Jesus when engaging with any sort of ethical dilemma – but it had obvious limitations.



The most honest answer to the question “What would Jesus do?” is “We really don’t know.”

Jesus had a capacity for shocking his followers and onlookers, and for doing and saying what was unexpected.

In addition, the situations in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century bear very scant resemblance to those in which we see Jesus in the scriptures – so we have little to guide us.

The basic idea behind asking “WWJD” is a good one, but the execution of it is trickier.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

A better approach might be to look at how Jesus engaged with people and situations in his own time and distil some general principles from this.

Today’s Gospel reading on this Sunday when we celebrate harvest together provides two excellent examples;

.....two startling encounters that Jesus has with people who are not part of his group of followers.

The first of these is a Gentile, a Syrophenician woman, whose daughter is sick. She asks Jesus for help and he, initially, refuses, suggesting that she is unworthy as a foreigner (a “dog” and not a child of Israel).

She argues back, and, seeing her faith, he relents and tells her that the girl is healed.

Jesus appears to change his mind – allowing himself to be persuaded by a Gentile, a foreigner, into action.

He responds with humility. A great spiritual gift to pray for as we celebrate Harvest and the miracle of the yearly cycle of seasons.

The second encounter is with a man from the region of the Decapolis – an area where Gentiles were in the majority and looked upon with disdain by the more orthodox religious authorities in places like Jerusalem.

People bring to Jesus a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment, and Jesus deliberately takes him away from the crowd and noise **to a quiet and private place.** *(Note that this is what we will do next Saturday at the Spiritual Growth Group, we come to this quiet and private place to spend time with Jesus)*

Jesus' physical actions communicate his intention in a way that the deaf man can understand.

Jesus, in other words, deals with the man in a way that makes sense to him – even if it seems strange to us.

He acts with sensitivity. **A second great spiritual gift to pray for as we celebrate Harvest in the time of Climate Crisis and we consider the impact that our consumption choices have on the planet And that each and everyone of us has a part to play in helping to address Climate Crisis.**

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The letter to James set as today's second reading makes clear that **how we act is as significant as what we believe.**

Faith is demonstrated in action, and in particular in how we treat our other people – young and old alike.

What we do, how and why we do it – this is how our faith is communicated to the wider world.

When we look to the Gospels for our pattern and model, **we see Jesus acting with humility and sensitivity when he encounters** other people.

Although we might be troubled at his initial response to the Syrophenician woman, **Jesus offers a pattern to his followers.**

He (1) listens and engages with someone he might wish to dismiss, (2) changes his thinking and then (3) commits himself to healing her daughter.

We might question whether the initial response was genuine, or *whether he was teaching his disciples a lesson by uttering commonly held beliefs*, but the result is the same:

he (1) humbled himself, (2) listened (3) and changed his mind.

He demonstrated that we may, after **listening** and **engaging humbly, change our minds** and act accordingly.

When Jesus takes the deaf man away from the crowd, he is *sensitive to the man's need for his full attention*.

His actions seem crude to us (*spitting, touching the man's tongue and sighing*), **but they are for the man's benefit**, not ours, so that he understands what is happening.

Jesus shows us that, however we might normally deal with others, **we should consider their needs and act with sensitivity**.

What would Jesus do? A better question is: **What did Jesus do?**

He acted with **humility and sensitivity with everyone** – even those who needed a different approach from usual. (**and again I mention our Spiritual Growth Group next Saturday from 10am start to 1130 in St Margarets – a different approach that usual for meeting Jesus and searching out where we are with him**)

In doing so, he gave us a perfect pattern for any occasion.

"He took him aside in private, away from the crowd." Mark 7:33

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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