



## **Parish of Finchampstead and California**

**week 5 – from 22 March 2015**

## **LENT WELL SPENT ... in the Name of Jesus: Son of Man**

### **Gospel reading – Mark 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. <sup>3</sup> Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup> And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' <sup>6</sup> Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> 'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' <sup>8</sup> At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? <sup>10</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup> 'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' <sup>12</sup> And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'

### **Context and background**

In the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is baptised by John and tempted by Satan; he calls his first disciples, exorcises evil spirits; he heals Peter's mother-in-law, 'many who had various diseases', and a man with leprosy. He is already attracting a large crowd and, in today's reading, the crowd both provokes the action that makes

the incident memorable and also provides the concluding chorus-like response to what has happened.

Present, for the first time, are teachers of the law who are alert to all that is implied when Jesus says 'your sins are forgiven'. In response to their apparently unspoken thoughts Jesus then heals the paralytic 'so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' (v10).

Unlike the titles of Jesus we have considered so far (*Son of God, Messiah, Son of David, Son of Mary*) all of which were applied by other people to Jesus, *Son of Man* is clearly in the first three Gospels Jesus' preferred way of describing himself, and is not used by others. And while his preference is clear, the precise meaning of *Son of Man* is not, which may be why it was rarely used by NT writers outside the Gospels.

There are three suggestions as to why Jesus used it so much:

1. The lack of precision may have been appealing in so far as it brought no preconceptions with it (contrast *Messiah*). In some Biblical contexts it means no more than *a man = a human being* eg Psalm 8:4; Ezekiel 2:1, 3:1 etc.
2. It aligns Jesus with humanity most directly and simply because he was a man; but also possibly with overtones of something more - esoteric Jewish ideas of a connection between an (unidentified) heavenly man with the first man Adam. And in John's Gospel, the *Son of Man* comes from heaven (eg John 3:13, 5:27, 6:62).
3. It makes a claim to heavenly status and the *Son of Man's* role with God in the future end-time judgement. See especially Daniel 7:13-14, where *one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven* and is worshipped by *all peoples and nations* for evermore. (This idea was further developed in other non-Biblical Jewish writings.) And during his interrogation by the high priest at his trial, Jesus unmistakably quotes v13; it is most likely this, rather than his acceptance of *Messiah* and *Son of God* (see notes on weeks 1 and 2) that provokes the high priest's angry reaction and charge of blasphemy (Mark 14:61-64). It is probably no coincidence that Mark reports thoughts of blasphemy in relation to the paralytic's healing right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Without using the specific term *Son of Man* Paul developed to their logical conclusions the ideas in points 2 and 3 - see eg 1 Corinthians 15:21-25&45-49; Philippians 2:8-11 - and they have been part of the mainstream of Christian belief ever since.

## **Questions on the Bible reading and context**

- 1 Why were the friends of the paralytic so determined to get him to Jesus?
- 2 Jesus describes this determination as faith. How does this affect the way we think about faith?
- 3 What is the connection between this faith and Jesus' forgiveness of the man's sins?
- 4 What would the paralytic, and his friends, have thought about this first action of Jesus?
- 5 Given Jesus' attitude elsewhere to the disconnection between sin and disability (see John 9:1-3), and the absence of forgiveness from the accounts of his other healings, why does he decide to forgive this man his sins? How might the presence of the teachers of the law have affected him?
- 6 In what ways does Jesus' healing of the paralytic (v11-12) confirm his authority to forgive sins (v10)?
- 7 Jesus uses the description *Son of Man* of himself in this passage (v10). What is he intending to convey by that (see notes in *Context and Background* above)?

## **Questions about ourselves**

- 8 Do we recognise fully the need for our sins to be forgiven?
- 9 What is our experience of our prayers not being answered, or being answered in ways we didn't expect? How does this affect our faith? How does it affect the way in which we pray?
- 10 How does it help to think of Jesus as the fully human *Son of Man*?
- 11 How easy is it to think also of Jesus as the *Son of Man* coming with the clouds of heaven for judgement at the end of time?
- 12 How much of the crowds amazement (v12) do we share when we reflect on all that Jesus was, and all he did for us?

## **Concluding Reflections**

**Forgiveness** - For the original hearers of Mark's Gospel, the story brings assurance of the power of Jesus to forgive sins. They, too, may be gathered in a house listening to someone preach the word. Just as teaching and exorcism belong together (1:21-82) so do 'speaking the word' and forgiveness. Whether or not the congregation of Mark's day experienced healings, they would certainly know about the new life that comes to those who are forgiven.  
*Morna Hooker*

**Jesus, Son of Man** - [This was] Jesus' characteristic way of referring to himself, just as he characteristically called God 'Father' and characteristically spoke of his mission as being in the service of God's 'kingdom' or rule. Jesus' innovative reinterpretation of 'kingdom', 'Father' (and by implication 'Son of God') and 'Son of man' sums up much of the thrust of his message ... He was not concerned to proclaim himself directly. His mission was to announce God and the coming of the divine rule. The present and future kingdom was the immediate theme of Jesus' message, even if that message involved some astonishing implications about his own person.  
*Gerald O'Collins*

### **Lent Lecture - Tuesday 24 March**

**Paralysis and the bid for freedom in life and faith. Olivia Graham** is a priest and spiritual director. Since 2013 she has been the Archdeacon of Berkshire. She was ordained after many years of doing development work in Africa. Her lecture will explore the things in our lives which inhibit our journey towards God and how we can find freedom to pursue it, with reference to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, and other more contemporary thinkers.

Tea and coffee will be available in St James' Church Centre from 7.45 and the Lecture will start in the hall at 8.

### **Other Lent Activities**

Monday morning 9-10 in Church - Lent prayer (silent prayer - come and go as you please).

Monday afternoon 2-3 (SJCC) - an opportunity to explore the weekly theme in more depth.