

Pray

There are moments where life pulls you in different directions... moments where different ideas and priorities compete for your focus. This Gospel passage this morning shows one of these moments for Jesus, his family, his followers, and his enemies. It also comes at one of those moments for us... as we hover between an unlocked country and a relocked country... in these moments we are reminded to hold on to our faith and hope.

If you're, like me, a little thrown to find ourselves back in Mark for our Sunday readings don't worry! We're at a tipping point with the lectionary- the set pattern of readings. We have finished following the disciples' journey after Easter and seen the Church begun... we have also explored Pentecost and Trinity and so now, we return to ordinary time where the altar frontals and general colour in Church is Green. So, we re-join Mark's gospel and meet Jesus during the mid-point of his ministry on earth. He has just called and appointed his disciples and crowds are beginning to follow him around and they are in Galilee. Because Jesus is at home his family arrive to try and stop him performing miracles because people were saying Jesus had lost his mind. Not only that but the scribes, important religious leaders, from Jerusalem, the Holy City had also come to stop him saying that he was clearly doing the work of the devil. Jesus is then torn between his family, the religious leaders, and his own ministry. He of course chooses to hold onto what he knows is right and continues his ministry. He also points out the problems with positions of both his family and the scribes.

At this point in his ministry Jesus has already been identified by the demons he is casting out... They have already said we know you're the son of God. But they don't have faith in Jesus. It's interesting to consider the contrast here of faith and knowledge. The demons know who Jesus is but they don't believe and yet the disciples don't yet know Jesus' identity, but they do believe. You would think that Jesus'

mother would both know his identity and believe in him, but it seems that's not the case. Whether she is driven by the pressure of neighbours saying her son is mad or worry for his safety we don't know but she does come to take him out of this situation...

The scribes don't know who Jesus is or believe in him. But they aren't interested in either instead they label him demonic. Jesus is then a madman, a demon possessed liar or the Messiah... CS Lewis called this the trilemma... He describes this situation and it's impact on how Jesus is seen historically like this

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus like: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell.^[note 1] You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

You might be wondering why I'm discussing the nature of Jesus' identity with a congregation of Christians... but the unsaid part of this argument is faith. Belief as I said before. Jesus' disciples chose to believe. His faith doubted and the scribes decried... For us today at a time where nothing is certain and there are many different pulls on our attention, I think this reminder that faith requires trust is important.

We, myself, and Michael, have conflicted demands on our time... leaving well... moving on... wanting to focus our time and attention on the work we have in front of us but also facing the challenges of

buying white goods online during a global pandemic! Not easy! It's difficult and hard but we must remember the faith of the disciples and focus on God. To have faith. We are all worried about whether lockdown will or should or won't or can't lift in the next few weeks. We are all facing our own challenges as well that demand our time and attention. Sometimes the world be telling us certain things just as the community was talking about Jesus to his family. We can easily be side-tracked and have our own judgement swayed by peers, or the media.

Not only this but we can also let our own insecurities and worries distract us. The scribes and Jewish religious leaders were threatened by Jesus. There was no way their own lifestyles and choices could accommodate the arrive of a messiah from Galilee who preach radical acceptance and forgiveness! Instead of letting that challenge them they denied it. Jesus could have saved them, but they instead assumed he must be working with the devil.

The disciples were risking their faith and place in the Jewish community by following Jesus. They were also risking their place in society generally by following him, someone everyone was calling mad. Yet their faith and belief bring them to accept and follow him. It's their example we need to follow when facing uncertainty and confusion. Where is God? Where is Christ in our situations? Will worrying about the cooker and dishwasher make our move any easier? No! They obviously do still need ordering but allowing it to make me stressed won't help. We need to use our judgement and conscious to make the decisions God wants.

For many of us we need to seek that through prayer and reflection. For many of us once we can identity other voices, that of the media or society and those of our own insecurities we are left with a better choice. Big or small we all face decisions like this every day and I hope and pray as we journey through this time of uncertainty that we can

together be inspired by the disciples and make choices in hope and faith. Amen.