

TRINITY 2

Today is not only designated 'Music Sunday' but it is also our Annual Woodbridge Regatta – which begins with our 'Songs of Praise' by the tea hut, and all our churches are invited, along with any who just roll up, so to speak, whether as tourists, 'floating' Christians or unbelievers alike! There are lovely stalls all around, and it is alright, I have already been told where the Adnams one is from our new Churchwarden, so thank you, Michelle! I have also been told, separately, that James is conducting for the opening of the Aldeburgh Festival this morning, at which Bishop Martin is preaching, so we all get 'brownie points', I guess.

I am not sure we can say the same for the crowd scene painted for us by St Mark in our Gospel. The writer is keen to point out that Jesus has bumped into a hostile crowd and they are quick to dismiss Jesus and actually say the unthinkable: 'He has gone out of his mind.' That is an offensive and cowardly accusation to hurl at anyone. Of course even more recent history of mental illness is actually bad history when you think of the term 'looney bin' or when you think of the victimisation of those really struggling with mental health issues today – many of them very complex and lifelong. It is so easy to dismiss or reject someone whose experience is different from ours, or whose frailty or vulnerability is exploited.

That is the setting in which Jesus finds himself as victim but he very much fights back:

“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”

And Mark, the physician, gets the irony of this encounter. Jesus does not possess ‘an unclean spirit’ at all. He is the One who heals our silent wounds, our dormant hurts, or our depression; whatever it is that breaks and burdens us, which Jesus wants us to be free of. Instead of the mental strains so many of us bear, He wants to lift us up and make us strong again.

I don’t mind admitting that I shed quite a few tears hearing the veterans of ‘D Day’ in Normandy telling their stories, some of whom have taken 50 years or more to speak at all about the loss of their mates and the final sacrifice they made. “I’m not a hero, said one. The heroes are those who didn’t come back home.”

Psychology is still, I believe, a ‘young science’; it is only in very recent history, for example, that post-traumatic stress (PTS) has been taken seriously by all our Armed Forces as such a real and debilitating condition. The same is true of all those living with dementia. It affects whole families, as it did with our Gospel episode. Jesus’ mother and brothers were understandably worried about his safety and his own wellbeing. The beloved physician then ‘ups the ante’ we would say, in his storytelling. His immediate family is not rejected or superseded, surely. The writer is instead taking

the opportunity, it seems to me, of making a dramatic ending to a dramatic scene, something Shakespeare could do and did do to such admirable effect. St Mark is saying that we are all part of Jesus' extended family, when we look to Him for healing, for acceptance, for everyday love. He drives the point home –

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

The irony again is that we belong in the arms of Christ's outstretched hands, to the One who was abused and rejected. He invites us, draws us closer to Him, to be nourished, fed, and sustained. As we come to receive Communion today with empty, outstretched hands we know that they will be filled with his own body and blood, his generous self-giving which is eternal. It is also unconditional whatever our state of mind or state of health, whatever our race, sexuality or nationality. The healer heals us all within the one, same, uniting Body of Christ.

I leave you with this wonderful, devotional prayer of cleansing and hope, 'Anima Christi', from the 14th century:

“Soul of Christ, sanctify me...

Amen.