

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: September 23rd 2019: St Mark Chapter 2 verses 1-17

Content: Back in Capernaum after a teaching mission; getting through the roof to get to the front of the healing queue; healing and forgiveness; recruitment of a tax collector; people who know they need forgiveness know themselves!

Background

More succinct than some of our study sections, but still quite a lot here. An open door policy is a bit unusual these days, especially when the door leads straight into the room. Tradition has it that our first Vicar's house door (in the Glade) was open so much that it was hard to shut. Roofs were beams with yard wide gaps filled with brushwood and clay – often grass grew on the roof. (c.f. 21st Century ecology – e.g. a school on the road to Sevenoaks.) Rather sad that this little house was so crowded because some of the spaces were taken by Jesus critics looking to find fault. Jesus shows the healing and forgiving God, not the opposite angry and condemning notion of God. Jesus' response to his critics is very powerful: *You condemn my declaration of God's forgiveness. You believe that disability results from sin, and can't be healed without the sin being dealt with. You can't actually see forgiveness, but you can see the healing. So the sin must have been dealt with!* Collapse of critic. In today's highly scientific age, we still have to recognise that body, mind and spirit are inter-related; and that chemistry can't explain or cure everything... Discuss the placebo effect!!

Note that the Sanhedrin's job, and therefore the job of its agents, was to guard against heresy and law breaking. Ring any bells regarding China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and (I have always had a soft spot for Queen Elizabeth I, whose view was on the lines of "Think what you like as long as you behave yourself"; though that goes only so far in allowing folk to go in fresh directions.

P.S. Priests don't forgive; and Jesus was clearly seen as going rather beyond pronouncing God's forgiveness; as well as short-circuiting the formal processes of repentance and absolution. No mention of the chap on the stretcher confessing and seeking absolution; indeed no explanation of what sinning he had done.

The calling of Levi/Matthew. Fishermen were one thing (though these were no Temple insider material); but one of Herod's tax collectors... no doubt cold-shouldered by many in this town on the Europe to Africa highway... (Tax collectors weren't paid; they topped up the tax to make a decent living.) Matthew gave up a lot to join Jesus, and it isn't certain that the fishermen jumped with joy at the new recruit. Matthew probably didn't write "Matthew's" Gospel; but it is widely believed that he collected the Jesus teachings on which Gospel writers drew.

Matthew's party: Every parent worries about their children associating with the wrong kind of people. Jesus really wasn't finicky about his hosts. "Sinners" were not just what we

would call sinners. They were people who didn't rigidly stick to the rules; and by this time the rules were getting rather silly. To see why, think of a rather delicate example. Using the toilet on the Sabbath could never have been counted as "work" – when you've got to go you've got to go; but, in today's terms, and assuming for the moment that the basics are covered by keeping clean on the Sabbath, some idiot is going to want to check out whether replacing the toilet roll, and, still more, buying a new toilet roll is OK.

Jesus' basic point is that people who don't think they need God, because they are doing just fine, are not a good recruiting ground.

Questions: *The usual question of what we learn to say and what we learn to do? Sitting in that house in Capernaum, perhaps owning that house in Capernaum, your reaction to the four friends and the stretcher coming through the roof? As Christians, do we need rules as well as the law of Love?*