

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Mark 10:32-: February 10<sup>th</sup>: Some Notes

At first glance, familiar material; but Mark doesn't waste time with vain repetition. In terms of geography, Jericho is about 15 miles from Jerusalem, and hosted many of the huge number of priests who served the Temple. The 15 mile figure is significant because males aged 12 or over who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem were expected to go there for Passover. Those who didn't tended to line the streets to cheer on those who were going. Mobile Rabbi lessons were common practice. So a lot of folk about, and maybe the priests more suspicious than welcoming.

Content: Jesus walking alone and ahead at first. For the third time and in more detail he talks about crucifixion and resurrection. In Matthew's Gospel, it is the Mother of James and John who asks for the top jobs for her sons. Here Mark is not afraid to blame the two brothers for seeking pride of place for themselves. Note that kings shared the wine cup with their favourites, and that this baptism is about total immersion not a bit of sprinkling. ("The waters have swept over them.") This James was the first of the Twelve to be killed. The servant/slave king didn't coincide with the normal ideas about kingship: kings had slaves to serve; they didn't serve themselves. Tuck away the ransom/exchange language. We'll come back to this. The blind man story (this time the man is named... because he became a disciple?): note the determination, the single-mindedness, the clarity of thought (compensating for lack of physical sight), and the throwing away of the cloak *and following in THE WAY*. Bartimaeus contrasts with the official Disciples.

The opening lines are significant. You sense the lone-ness of Jesus. We are all, to a greater or lesser extent social animals, but we all have times of lone-ness, even if there are other people around. Some decisions can not be shared. Sometimes we realise that we are physically with other people, but not in tune with them: "I seem to be the only person who doesn't find this funny", or "No, we are not all agreed...sorry (or perhaps not sorry!)". In this account, they are all walking in the same direction, but with very different things in mind.

Before slagging off the disciples, think little Jew in little occupied country wanting great big all-powerful God to overthrow the greatest Empire, and being offered a Messiah naked, humiliated, tortured, and dead – one more victim of that Roman Empire. No thank you!

And now the tricky bit: Ransom, Hostage, Expiation, Atonement. Why does Jesus constantly link salvation with suffering, and why did Jesus have to die? As to the first, I don't think we are entitled to tell someone else that suffering is good for them. I hope we can hang on in there long enough to find that suffering can be a transforming experience for "me". One distinguished modern theologian (a man) quotes a woman who said that women have insights that men lack into the positive aspects of shedding blood and suffering pain. I'm not qualified to comment.

Down the years, there have been some unconvincing, not to say repulsive, “explanations” of why Jesus had to die. An angry God has to be bought off by His Son taking the punishment God wanted to inflict on the rest of us. “The wrath of God is satisfied”, to quote the ghastly hymn verse. This sounds even more unconvincing when linked to the equally repulsive theory of “sinners” suffering temporary agonies in “purgatory” or eternal agonies in “hell” to “pay for” their sins. (If Jesus has already “paid” .....?) And, having just been reminded of Auschwitz etc, it isn’t as if torturing to death ended on Good Friday.

Then there is the idea that Jesus paid the “ransom” not to His Father, but to the devil – which puts the devil on a negotiating footing with God. (I suppose that from a devilish perspective, getting God in Jesus suffering and then presiding over an eternal hell of human suffering is not too bad an outcome. This account is a bit ambivalent about the devil also burning in due course bit; but blame Dante more than the Bible for any confusion.)

Alongside these narratives, goes the idea of Jesus in his death focussing on the “sin of Adam”. If you find the two Creation stories good philosophy with much to teach us, but never even intended as history, you won’t find the link between Crucifixion and “original sin” very convincing either.

Perhaps, it is enough to hang on to the two firm realities: A) There is suffering in human life, and there is sin, and sometimes (only sometimes) the two go together. B) Christ is in each and every one of the whole of suffering and sinning humanity, and the solidarity of God with human suffering, and the effect on God of human sin, cannot be better revealed than by Christ on the Cross. That Incarnate Suffering redeems our suffering and our sin. How, I have not the least idea; but I can see it and feel it.