

July 1st 2018

So How was your 'crossing to the other side' adventurous week this past week?

Did you have some 'wow' moments along with your 'woow' moments, because life is like that we have Wow and Woow times of life?

Last week we entered the Marken story of Jesus on the move, "Let us cross the other side". I hope I was clear in suggesting that this is less about actual stories of Jesus but that of Mark retelling the stories in a way that encourages his community of faith 30,40,50 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are concerns in Marks faith community, we are not sure what they are all we have is Marks response in telling the Jesus stories to encourage and gives hope to their lives.

21 centuries later we are still telling these stories, and I hope we are telling them in a way that encourages our faith, not as 1st C. people with 1st C. mindsets and superstitions, but as 21st C. people with our own mindsets and superstitions. All be it though there is enough to say that we as a church, church universal, are stuck or at best caught between the times of the 16th & 21st C. and sometimes we don't know which way to turn.

There is a beautiful subtle retelling of Pooh Bear finding a hat,

“The Little Bear reached down and picked up the strange object and stared at it for a long time, turning it over in his paws as he examined it.

At last, he exclaimed: “I am not sure what it is, and I am not sure what it is not, but I do feel a curious urge to wear it on my head.

So he did.

It was a perfect fit. It nestled easily between Pooh’s ears upon the crown of his furry head, with a brim which settled comfortably at the back.

“I do believe” concluded Pooh, “that what I have found is most definitely a hat.”

Mark has a similar struggle, trying to decipher what he has found in the story of Jesus, with a people who seem to be stuck, 30, 40 50 years after the death of Jesus. They don’t know which way to turn. Yet in these wonderful narratives that Mark presents to them and to us, comes no easy answer. Starting with, “Let us go across to the other side”, and the disciples complaining to Jesus, ‘that he does not care that they were perishing’. Jesus stills the storm. Then the story we haven’t told, the healing of the man with unclean spirits living amongst the tombstones being cleansed of a

legion of demoniac's cast into swine who throw themselves into the deep. And he sends the now cleansed man away to his home to proclaim what God had done for him.

“While still by the sea”, and that phrase is dropped in there for good effect, not just a geographical location. The sea in Hebrew Mythology represents chaos and destruction.

Then the Mark sandwich. Mark begins a story of Jairus a leader from the synagogue, possibly a ‘Roman collaborator’, the empire and yet Jesus treats him with dignity As Jesus walks through the crowd this woman, marginalise in society somehow gets close enough to exercise her superstition or faith that if she could touch but once the lowest and least possible part of Jesus garment she would be healed. And she is, and Jesus acknowledges her faith and sends her on her way, healed, restored back into the society that for so long has kept her on the margins. Then the continuation of the story of the little girl, doom and gloom hit, the child is ‘dead’ all is lost. Jesus says, hold onto your faith lets go and see, and we know how it ends, the girl is restored back to her family.

All this is not a literal story but wonderful imagery written in the context of Hebrew and possibly Greek story familiar to the hearers. There is symbolism, regarding the sea, there is symbolism with the three personalities being restored to the community, a

symbolism of an Empire, Roman Empire being challenged and defeated, symbolism that goes way back to Elijah and Elisha restoring, giving life and hopes to the marginalised, unclean and lost. Symbolism in the girl's age, this is not just an idle detail. They are stories of resurrection, life, love, community, hope, faith, courage, equality.

“Pooh came along Piglet. I want you to be the first to celebrate the Arrival of The New Hat Upon My Head.”

Piglet eyed the blue cap. “It truly is a fine hat, Pooh. A very fine, blue, Pooh Hat. But tell me, why are you Back to Front ?”

Pooh frowned. “Back to Front? What is Back to Front ?”

“Er...Back to Front...Front to Back... something to do with Wrong Way Round.”

“Bother!” said Pooh. “What can you mean ?”

Piglet was not very good at explaining things; certainly not something as complicated as Back to Front. “Perhaps you should ask Rabbit or Owl.”

Marks community needed to hear those stories, maybe not of Pooh and Piglet, Stories of courage, hope and triumph. For 30,40,50 years after the death of Jesus and the promises of the Kingdom that has not yet come, with a Roman Empire showing no mercy, Jewish

authorities becoming more and more antagonistic to the 'People of the Way', follows of this Risen Christ story, They, Mark's community, were feeling God's absence. God not present in their worst of times.

So Mark tells them these resurrection stories, stories of disciples in despair, feeling that God had abandoned them. Tales of a Roman Empire not overcoming Gods presence. Stories enabling people to belong and no longer be outcasts was an essential element of caring and played a significant role in Jesus' ministry. Some have suggested that the story was told especially to celebrate Jesus' generous and caring attitude towards women.

Marks community was in need of being turned around.

Rabbit noticed the Arrival of the New Hat Upon Pooh's Head. "Good Heavens !"

"But what do you think of my new hat? Piglet says it is Front to Back. Or Round way Wrong."

"Well," said Rabbit, "If that is what Piglet says then it is he who is Front to Back, I mean, Back to Front. Your very fine, blue hat, dear Pooh, is the Wrong Way Round! And that is no use, no use at all."

"I don't understand," said Pooh, who most definitely did not understand.

"How can I put this, tactfully," said Rabbit. "Well, Pooh, a hat – if it is to be a hat, and not something else such as a...erm.. such as a "Not A Hat" if it is to be a hat, then it must face the right direction. For, if you do not go in the direction that a hat is facing, then you are clearly going to live out your days ... in the opposing direction... to er... the one in which your hat is facing. Do you see what I mean ?"

"Yes," replied Pooh. Then he thought about it. "On second thoughts, no. Not even a bit."

Rabbit began to lose patience for if the truth be told, Rabbit had even confused himself by what he had said. He drew a deep breath and said impatiently: "A hat, Pooh, is not a hat unless it is facing the correct way. And your hat is facing the wrong way. I suggest you get a hat which is facing the right way. Yours is Back to Front."

I believe that we as Christians have often misunderstood the nature of Jesus and call for us to offer ministry in his name. Jesus ministry was undoubtedly powerful. But it was not one in which he exercised power over others (making them do what he wanted). Nor did he exercise power for others (doing for them what they could do for themselves). He also didn't provide power under others (serving as a safety net for them when they couldn't function).

How often have you heard, 'Mum where are my socks, where's the butter, how do I put the rubbish out'. Sometimes, sadly, I see mum's, wives, go and sort it out for them, where in fact we should be saying "sort it out for yourselves, you have the skills, abilities, resources grow up, mature, learn, learn for yourself".

You see we don't allow people to grow up or help communities to mature. If they only ever do what we tell them to, or we are forever doing for them what they can do for themselves and last and equally as demeaning is serving as a safety net, picking them up every time they struggle. These forms of power, when used consistently, keep communities from growing up, taking responsibility. Such forms of ministry make them dependent and prevent communities from developing their full capacities.

As Pooh wandered in the wood, he felt troubled by the advice of his two dearest friends. So he decided to find a Quiet Spot and to sit down and have a Serious Think. By chance, the Quiet Spot he chose was also a place he knew had a hive filled with fresh honey in its lowest branches. So he had a Serious Think and a Midmorning Snack.

A half an hour later, Pooh leapt up. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "A hat is NOT a hat unless it faces the direction it wants to go. My hat is Back to Front. So I will simply need to go in the direction that my hat is facing. Then surely my hat will be a Proper Hat."

So, off he went, walking backwards into the forest, whistling merrily to himself, happy now that his hat was a hat and that it was pointing in the right direction.

XOXOXO

Part 2 to be continued