Reflection on Mark 3 20 – 35

Did you watch Adrian Chiles television programme – called The Road to Istanbul? Seven celebrities, two Catholics, two Muslims, a Protestant, a Jew and an Atheist set out on a 1400 mile pilgrimage. On their way, they visited many sites of great religious significance whilst debating the meaning and purpose of faith.

At the end of the journey, Adrian reflected on the experience. He was asked, Did you find the experience showed you how a diverse group can get on together through tolerance and friendship? He replied;

Well, I found I've got more in common with a liberal Muslim, for example, than I would probably have with a conservative Roman Catholic. It's where you are on that spectrum. Jesus said, the meek shall inherit the earth. But the meek have got very poor PR, because normally, when you get religious people on, you normally get the headbangers . Nobody's interested in the mild ones. We seven were all mild people, in religious terms, or irreligious terms, if you like. And I thought that might lack something when it came to the programme going out, because we lacked a headbanger. We lacked somebody who was dead set in their ways. Islam is the only way to God, or Christianity is the only way to God. Or Judaism is. We didn't have any of that, and I thought it might make it a bit meek, but in fact, I think the beauty of it is the meekness of it.

What can we draw for that?

In a sense, no matter how dysfunctional they seemed to be at times, they became something like family. Family is as fundamental to the Bible as anything else. The Bible begins in Genesis, not with talk of nations and tribes…but families. So is it fair to say that most of the time we’re God’s children, God’s daughters and sons who bring great joy as well as great consternation?

Can we say that Jesus’ family is an open family and that we can walk freely through the door into his house?

We may bring dysfunction to the door with us—and at times we can look like a group of misfits.

So; what did you think of the picture on the front of today’s service? Who are those people? What are they wearing and why? What do they believe? Do they represent us in some way? Is there something missing?

I’m sure we will all have different ideas, but here are some thoughts.

Who are they? Well, in terms of their heritage, it looks as if they are quite diverse. Most of them appear to be of a certain age – except the old fella at the end. Do they seem focused? Apparently, they are all looking in the same direction. Are they all of one mind?

What are they wearing and why? Most of them appear to be casual and possibly relaxed. They don’t appear to be in uniform, suggesting that they might represent different roles or have various opinions. And what about those masks? Is that an indication that they are willing to comply carefully with the rules? Or do they feel gagged and frustrated by over-bearing regulations?

What do they believe? No outward symbols of belonging, either to each other or the outside world. We would need to interact with them to find out. How much do those masks get in the way?

Do they represent us? I think we could argue that their age range doesn’t exactly fit our worshipping community! And we live in a part of the country that is less culturally diverse. Having said that, we can’t tell if their opinions and views on many a topic might or might not coincide with ours.

Is there something missing from this picture? Well, I can’t see the kids! Are they very young and not tall enough to be visible? And does that also mean that this picture represents us?

We can draw many different conclusions from this simple picture. It all depends on who we are, what our life experiences have been and what we hope for the future. It also led me on to thinking about what we do, individually and collectively, within what we might call God’s Team in Bromsgrove – if that’s not too arrogant. Some of you may recognise the name Meredith Belbin, especially if you have been in a management role. Dr Belbin argued that it’s not just what people do - but how they do it - by the roles they occupy. No; relax; I’m not going to give a lecture on management theory or give you Belbin’s test. It just made me think about how we contribute to God’s Team in Bromsgrove. So, here is another version of the Beatitudes for consideration;

Blessed are the Visionaries – for they will set our course for the future.

Blessed are the Dreamers – for they will broaden our horizons.

Blessed are the Inspirers – they will motivate us to do our best.

Blessed are the Planners – for they will deliver and manage our resources.

Blessed are the Carers – for they will guard the vulnerable.

Blessed are the Critics – for they will challenge and keep us on track.

Blessed are the Grafters – for they will ensure that what we plan actually happens.

Blessed are the Sweeper-Uppers - for they will tidy up any loose ends.

Can you recognise yourself? Are you able to appreciate other people’s contributions different from your own? Can you identify your Strengths and Areas for Development? Can you identify those people who can help you in this cause? Do you have the courage to ask for that help?

As we heard at the end of today’s gospel reading; anyone who does God’s will is considered a close family member of Jesus. May we all be blessed as part of God’s family, as we strive to do His will, even if that means we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for great will be our reward in heaven.

As we have just sung; Build your church, Lord; make us strong, Lord.

Amen.