

LEYLAND UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
SERMON: Sunday 14th May 2017

Lesson: John 14.1-14

Address

John's gospel, the writer who produced this telling of the Jesus story, does make me struggle at times. Some of the words that come out of Jesus' mouth in John, just don't ring true for me.

Like in this passage where we have what seems a declaration of Christian supremacy and exclusivity – there is no other way, there is no truth, no worthwhile life outside of Christianity and everyone else is beyond God's care and concern.

I am attracted more to the Jesus of Mark's gospel, and as they are written from a similar perspective, Matthew and Luke.

Mark is the shortest gospel, it has no birth story or post-Easter events (at least in its earliest version), and all of the focus is on the message, and not so much the person.

Jesus will accept the title of messiah and Son of Man from his followers, but the message is all about God's kingdom. About justice, mercy, and liberation, about love, acceptance and equality; about peace, non-violence and community.

The story that Mark tells of Jesus is a lot more human. Yes, there are healing miracles recorded there that to our modern eyes seem unbelievable, but two thousand years ago people did see miracles. Performer of wonders was a career option in those days. Jesus wasn't the only one who did them.

We can't get our heads around them, sometimes wish they would also happen for us, but if we place ourselves in that time they were common place.

We could immerse ourselves in coming up with explanations or their symbolism, (how they relate to Old Testament themes and images) but it's also possible they just happened. Jesus' ability to heal, in mind, body and of relationships, was part of who he was. But for me, it is more crucial why he did these things, rather than how.

When it comes to the nature miracles we have in the gospel – stilling a storm, walking on water, feeding a crowd, the Transfiguration – then I do lean more towards the symbolic meaning of them.

In other words, I believe these stories are told by the gospel writers as part of their declaration of who Jesus has become in the life of the early Church. These stories declare the gospel writers' realisation of Jesus as God's revelation, as being greater than Moses or Elijah.

All hinted at in the life Jesus lived, but only fully revealed in the wonder, mystery and energy of the Resurrection.

Mark holds for me the essence of what being a Christian means. It doesn't let us drift into the sentimentalism of the Nativity story or confuse us with Resurrection appearances, it tells us the story of a man.

Mark's gospel is a fast-paced story. It begins with the declaration: the good news of Jesus Christ. We then hear of John the Baptist's ministry, Jesus is baptised and heaven declares: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

He's in the wilderness for two verses and begins his ministry which is summarised as: the good news of God, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

For the first eight or Mark's sixteen chapters Jesus is in Galilee, he calls his disciples, heals, preaches, teaches, trains and sends out the disciples, is rejected in his home town, feeds crowds, and then at the half-way point Peter declares him the Messiah.

Then Jesus and the disciples start to move towards Jerusalem, still healing and teaching as he goes.

When we get to chapter eleven Jesus enters Jerusalem at Passover to the delight of the crowd, clears the Temple, carries on teaching, shares the Passover meal, prays, is betrayed, interrogated, beaten, condemned, crucified and dies. He is buried and then the women discover the empty tomb, hear the message that Jesus is raised, and then run away in fear.

Mark is a story of a journey, of being on the Way with Jesus, of learning what being a disciple is about, all leading us towards a response.

When we get to the end and hear that the women were silent, the writer wants our response to be: 'if they are silent, then I will speak.' Mark is a story that builds towards our response.

It tells us all we need to know about Jesus and the message he declared and lived, and then empowers us to get on with it.

I do hope that this will encourage you to read it this week. You'll find it just after Matthew, at the beginning of the New Testament, and it'll take you one to two hours to read.

It is my foundation in Mark's gospel that helps me to gain meaning from John's. When I reflect on John's Jesus saying: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" I hold it against the Jesus I see in Mark.

Jesus declaring God's kingdom, showing others how to live, teaching them how to discover wisdom, and I will confidently declare Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, and shows us the Father. But I will do it in a manner that affirms rather than excludes.

In exploring the life Jesus lived, his teachings, actions and attitudes, I have discovered a path, learnt that truth is essential, and that life has meaning. In this I have had God revealed to me, and through prayer and journeying with fellow travelers, I discover more about the way I should go, and what life is about.

We are followers of the Way of Jesus, we are pilgrims, travelers, we are people moving towards a destination. We have not arrived. To quote John Robinson as the Pilgrim Father's left: 'There is yet more truth and light yet to break forth from God's holy word.'

There is yet more truth and light to break forth from the Bible, from the wonders of God's Creation, and from each and every one of us; as we seek to live out the way of Jesus.

Jesus is: our way, our truth, and our life. Let us step out in faith. **Amen**