

When I say the word “division” what do you think of? No not mathematics! Today I’m thinking of the division and separation in our world and in our personalities.

In March 2017 I had the privilege of being on the selection panel that interviewed Jon. So much prayer and preparation went into that day. I kept asking God to give me a sign who His chosen person would be. Would it be how they looked? How they answered our questions? How they interacted with members of the church family? A person of faith, integrity, transparency? What was I looking for? On reflection I can see it was a soft undivided heart turned to the Lord. Jon has that, and he’s such a blessing to us.

In our reading today different groups of people are wondering who Jesus is? Where does His power to heal and drive out evil spirits come from? It’s an important question to ask ourselves.

People often say things like they accept Jesus is an important historical figure, that he was a great moral teacher but they are not willing to believe Jesus is God. C S Lewis says “You must make a choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about him being a great human teacher, he has not left that open to us, he did not intend to.”

Strong words indeed and I wonder if Lewis had this passage of scripture in mind when he wrote them. Here Jesus is being accused of being mad and/or demon possessed. Religious officials have come from Jerusalem to see what all the fuss is about? They spread rumours that Jesus is possessed by a demon and the miracles are the result of black magic. Even those close to Jesus are saying “He is out of his mind”.

Let’s notice how Jesus responds to these accusations. He isn’t offended. He doesn’t get defensive. Instead he speaks in parables. “How can Satan drive out Satan?” Jesus response acknowledges the reality of Satan. An evil power that actively works against the compassionate and reconciling love of God. There are a lot of words beginning with “D” we can associate with Satan, devil, deceit, destroy, distress, disease, death, disruption, etc. But the one Jesus uses here is division. It’s as if he says: If I was using satanic powers how could I drive myself out? I would be divided against myself and that would never work. Sadly division is part of human life but there is no division in Jesus. Division, disagreements, separation, just think of all the distress it causes. I can personally testify to the huge pain of divorce (another D word).

Where there’s division, there’s tension, we are not at ease, we are not living in the way Jesus intends. Division can be both in our outer world and in our inner world. We feel unfulfilled, split, or that something is missing. We can be aware of not liking bits of ourselves. Feeling divided is uncomfortable. Often unconscious but nevertheless, the rejected bits of us are there. Our enemy Satan is only too happy to keep it that way! Whereas Jesus wants to make us whole.

St Augustine famously said “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” What are the aspects of our lives that make us restless? Does this restlessness come from feeling divided? Parts of us we would rather keep hidden. The “you” people see differing from the secret inner you. Maybe we notice we often feel jealousy, we’re competitive, prone to shame or perfectionism, maybe we keep ourselves separate, we’re judgemental. I have a tendency to feel insecure, I wish I

didn't. A lot of my behaviour has its root in helping me gain a sense of security, even though I believe my true security is in Christ.

What Jesus says next is that the strong man has to be tied up so that property from his house can be plundered. What's the meaning of this? Who or what is the strong man, maybe Satan, who we know Jesus has won the victory over. Can I suggest to you that the house represents our lives and the property those aspects of life that keep us separate from God and one another. They are among the things, we have mentioned, that make our hearts restless, that's why Jesus wants to have access to them, so our hearts can be free, undivided, resting in Him. To become free we need to recognise these emotions and behaviours so we can allow Jesus to integrate, heal the division within us, so God can have more access to our lives. That's why the "strong man" has to be tied up, made ineffective.

Thinking along these lines explains why self awareness is a necessary part of Christian discipleship. The more we truly know ourselves the more we can know God. Quiet days, being part of a small group, making time to sit with a gospel passage you find meaningful, seeking prayer ministry can prove beneficial life changing experiences. If what I'm saying resonates for you please don't leave it. Talk to a trusted friend or to Revd Jon or Terry.

The battle against evil is all too real but remember, Satan is a defeated foe. He is no match for King Jesus.

Jesus came to give us abundant life, resting in His love. Jesus wants to heal the things that divide us, to make us whole, individually and as a community. To set us free, so we can flourish and serve Him with joy.

Let's end with a verse of scripture:

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Could we pray together for a moment:

Dear Lord Jesus please help us.

Opening our tender, bruised hearts to your Holy Spirit isn't something we find easy.

We offer you our fear. Help us to trust that your desire is always to love us, heal us and make us whole.

As we get to know ourselves may we get to know you.

Amen