

It's you I like

Who am I describing?

A tiny, miserable and insignificant band of uprooted men and women standing on the margins of a hostile empire.

It's the description that Claus Westermann gives to the exiles dragged from Jerusalem to Babylon but it could equally describe any number of people experiencing forces much larger than themselves and leaving them utterly disadvantaged.

How about those made redundant when a multi-national shuts down a car plant?

What about a young person who attends a huge school and feels different to everyone there?

Or a small church being told by the Diocese they might be closed, or merged, or lose their Vicar because they don't pay their way.

Or the people of Jesus day living under the brutal rule of the Roman empire and a local despotic king.

A tiny, miserable and insignificant band of uprooted men and women standing on the margins of a hostile empire.

The prophet Isaiah speaks into the exiles situation and what happens is translation; which is a key facet of our faith.

Their situation is translated in a different way. Your perilous experience is not quite what you think it is and can be seen (translated) differently. A good example would be the sermon on the mount – Blessed are the poor in Spirit – theirs is the kingdom of God. We are enabled to see and understand our experiences from a different perspective – it is translated.

To the exiles in Babylon; the tiny group of miserable and insignificant people – God says, you are precious in my sight, I love you and I will give others in exchange for you and rescue you.

Now if you are anything like me you want to ask some questions.

Hold on – if you love us so much and care for us etc etc...how come we have ended up a tiny miserable group of insignificant people on the edge of a hostile empire???

OR – Why am I redundant? Why is my child sick? Why did my Mum have to die?

Why doesn't God intervene in our difficulties BEFORE our difficulties?

You cannot separate the cause and effect. There are some things that happen that seem unjust and unfair...but there's a great deal more that is brought about by our own wilful purposes. Israel suffered the exile because they turned away from God and made alliances with the wrong people. A very great deal of our suffering is brought about by the selfish behaviour of others.

Bangladesh suffers more from climate change than most and they haven't contributed to it like the industrialised nations.

Into the suffering, the questions, the injustice and the feeling of being tiny, miserable and insignificant comes.....?

Jesus.

In our reading from Luke Jesus is simply standing in line with everyone else. He doesn't approach the Jordan river with swelling music, angels singing, a halo round his head. He lines up and waits his turn and is baptised by John like everyone else.

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One question to ask and answer before going on.

John's baptism was a baptism to repent of sins. We are shown clearly Jesus wasn't a sinner. What's he getting baptised for?

I think Carol Lakey Hess comes close to it with her explanation. (It's an essay I read on this passage) The clue to why Jesus is baptised lies in his genealogy which follows on immediately in chapter three.

In Jesus genealogy are rogues, sinners, saints, notables, Royalty and everything in between. Jesus was born *from* as well as *into* a world of systemic sin. He is showing solidarity with us and acknowledgment of the sin of the world and the structures and systems of the world, flawed and tragic. He identifies with it and repents as part of it. He is incarnate – part of a sinful world and stands with us and is baptised like us.

He lines up with broken, sinful and damaged souls and is baptised too.

Then Luke tells us – he prays. Matthew, Mark and John don't mention this but prayer is one of Luke's big themes. Jesus is baptised and then prays and while praying we have his anointing by the Holy Spirit and the Trinity is revealed in this scene. God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and the voice of God the Father.

I have been struck by the power of the affirmation Jesus receives. You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.

To be affirmed, loved and accepted has very great power, particularly if you happen to feel tiny, miserable and insignificant.

Recently Katherine has replaced her favourite film with a new favourite film – A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood. It's a true

story about the encounter between a hard-bitten and cynical journalist and the extra-ordinary Mr Fred Rogers who for 30 years made television programmes for pre-school children. In the film he is played impeccably by the peerless Tom Hanks.

Bearing in mind his very young audience, Fred Rogers dealt with loss, sadness, divorce, hospitals, death, tragedies, as well as all the joyful and wonderful things of life. He never shied away from being real about the feelings young children had.

In and through it all he affirmed these young children. Here are the lyrics of one of his songs

I like you as you are
Exactly and precisely
I think you turned out nicely
And I like you as you are

I like you as you are
Without a doubt or question
Or even a suggestion
Cause I like you as you are

I like your disposition
Your facial composition
And with your kind permission
I'll shout it to a star (etc etc)

Here is another...

It's you I like
It's you I like,
It's not the things you wear,
It's not the way you do your hair--
But it's you I like.
The way you are right now,
The way down deep inside you--
Not the things that hide you,
Not your toys--
They're just beside you.

But it's you I like--
Every part of you,
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings
Whether old or new.
I hope that you'll remember
Even when you're feeling blue
That it's you I like,
It's you yourself,
It's you, it's you I like.

He didn't treat his audience as young consumers, or fans, but sought to encourage them, help them, teach them, and be a steady, safe influence.

If you are growing up in a home where you are shouted at, ignored, looked after but not really cared for here was someone affirming your true, genuine worth.

What we witness at Jesus baptism is a personal, deep, loving affirmation and I believe that God would wish to affirm each of us.

That we are loved and cherished and if we are feeling tiny, miserable, insignificant and isolated then there's good news. Our God rescues.

And if we are all too conscious of sin and failure and the mistakes we have made there's good news. Our God forgives.

And if Jesus was here today he would say, church...go on standing in line with those who feel broken by sin, tiny and miserable and isolated and powerless. Affirm their worth, accept them as they are and leave the rest to me.

And if Luke were here...he would suggest we pray. Frequently and fervently asking for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to equip us with the compassion. Love and acceptance that can transform a soul feeling tiny, miserable, insignificant standing on the margins of a hostile world.

Let us pray.

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 9/1/22