

Sunday, 18 October 2015  
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
Green Proper 24  
Mark 10:35-45

I'm an incomplete failure xx2

I failed my first driving test, I failed my mock History O Level, I failed a clarinet exam, I failed to sell life assurance, I failed to make chick pea burgers, I failed to catch the right train from Paris to La Rochelle, I failed my Greek exam, I failed to attend my review meeting with the Dean of the cathedral.

I'm an incomplete failure.

Jesus worked in trade in a backwater, had a common name and a rough accent. Most of his team were uneducated fishermen who betrayed and denied him, they squabbled, were competitive and regularly failed. Many people abandoned Jesus when the pressure piled on or they realised that there's no such thing as a free lunch. If Jesus' success was measured by bums on seats then during his earthly ministry he did atrociously. If Jesus'

success was measured by prosperity then to get yourself killed only three years in is hardly a leadership model to aspire to. If Jesus' success was measured by his ability to network and influence the great and the good, then he managed to upset the empire, in the form of Pontius Pilate, royalty in the form of Herod, and he managed to upset the religious establishment in the form of the Scribes and Pharisees. But Jesus is about failure not success, God is strong in our weakness.

On the cross some shouted, 'If you are the Son of Man - save yourself'. Messiahs don't end up losing, messiahs don't end up failing. From time immemorial, people have wanted to get behind the front runner, the winning team, back the right horse, align ourselves to the rising star, and be part of the 'in' crowd.

When it comes to daring and courage that is demanded of a disciple of Christ, and so lacking in the rich man of last week's reading - we have to be prepared to fail and ask stupid questions if we are to learn and be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Like

learning a language or making an omelette, we have to cope with mess and untidiness in order to achieve and invent and create.

Failure is an option, not the type of failure that comes with a telling off, a stern look a disapproving glance. Not the type of failure that says you're no good, must try harder. Jesus ministry was untidy, it was messy, and things went wrong. Yet in the midst Jesus knew that He had God the Father with him through the good times and the bad.

The disciples are promised in the gospel that they too will share the cup, an image for the suffering servant, they too will be persecuted suffer and be executed. "Yes, Yes", they say, "We are able" - 'Now, about who gets to sit where? Put in a good word for me with Him upstairs', they say.

As we've continued with Bible study on a Thursday evening looking at the gospel of Mark, it's been encouraging to learn just how often the disciples get in a muddle. You might think that tagging along with Jesus would ensure his followers would 'get it'.

Alas not - time again Mark uses a literary device, a bit like a sandwich where Jesus explains what's going to happen, very often, that he'll be crucified and resurrected. After that explanation, the disciples come back with statements like - now look, we've given up everything to follow you - or, over my dead body are you getting crucified ( I'm paraphrasing). In today's reading Jesus is teaching the disciples gathering them all together having only just explained a point and yet here they are squabbling and getting jealous and competitive and now angry.

Getting it wrong is part of learning, making mistakes comes with being a disciple. But Jesus isn't the Alan Sugar of the boardroom and you are not the apprentice to get fired if you don't deliver. Being vulnerable being prepared to face your demons, overcoming fear is the heart that Jesus is looking for.

At bible study there's no such thing as a dumb question. At the feeding of the five thousand someone thought better of it but then couldn't help themselves suggesting that 'Well it's a dumb idea but could you do

something with this boy's picnic? I know there's thousands of us but you are Jesus after all.

There is power in daft ideas. Have you ever asked a question and been humiliated? At school we all hated our Physics teacher because he'd delight in humiliating us with impossible questions. On the other hand, we loved our French teacher - she was passionate that we became as good as we could in her subject.

One of my favourite books that I read to Jasmine is called 'Goat and Donkey in the Strawberry Sunglasses'.

'Goodness', said Donkey one morning there is nothing to eat! The cupboard is BARE. I really must go shopping today, but I am so busy!

'Oh Donkey', said Goat, 'I will go shopping for you. I am good at shopping'. Now, Donkey knew that goat was often muddly and forgetful. But they were best friends, and Donkey also knew that best friends must be thoughtful and kind to each other.

‘Are you SURE’ he asked ‘because you might get in a muddle

‘Today’ said goat I will not be muddly at all!

Well as you can imagine, Goat did get muddly and came back with anything but the shopping list, including some strawberry sunglasses.

When Donkey saw all the thigs that Goat had bought he was surprised ‘Oh Goat’ he said -

‘You have got muddled! Where are the apples and carrots and cabbages and ice cream for supper?’

Goat’s face fell

‘Oh’ he said feeling rather foolish I had a little trouble with the list

‘I guessed as much’ said Donkey

Then he put on his sun hat and tooted the trumpet to show Goat how pleased he was to have them

‘But’ said donkey ‘we still don’t have anything for supper. We will go shopping Together and this time I will help you’

‘Goody’ said Goat ‘yes let’s’

And that is (almost) exactly what they did!

So you see the moral of this tale is that the disciples were actually goats and Jesus was in fact a donkey!

Do you here the willingness of Goat, the trust Donkey places in Him, disappointment at failure, the compassion of Donkey's response and the willingness to journey with Goat and help him to get the job done. There's no mention of the wasted time or money - Donkey loved Goat and they remained good friends.

Goat was willing to try knowing that he has a tendency to get muddly.

The bible can leave you feeling muddly. It's not about getting the right answers, it's about trying to ask questions about life the universe and everything. The bible is a series of books describing people's encounters and experiences of God. It attempts to show you what God is like and who Jesus is. It's about getting to know the kingdom of God, it's about relationship. It's not an end itself. It points out how life is and how to be fully

fulfilled according to the manufacturer's instructions.

So here's the challenge, if you do study the bible with others, try to put into words why you do and then tell others and invite others to join us. If you don't join with others, ask yourself how exactly are you training to be a disciple of Jesus?

Remember, failure is an option, there's no such thing as a stupid question, and like the disciples who got muddled, and Jesus was always prepared to wrestle with their confusion, to wear the strawberry sunglasses they'd bought by mistake and to accompany them back into town to get the shopping for tea. Jesus is not looking for perfection, he wants a heart that is open to his calling, and he wants followers with willingness to try.

I'm an incomplete failure, a work in progress, but I know that if I make myself available to Jesus and other followers like all of you we will be gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ

If I had one prayer only, but I knew it would be answered, I pray that men women and children around the globe become as Jesus in words and deeds. But that is why we are here, in this extraordinary project called life that we work together with Jesus to change self and society. One day all people will bow the knee before Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Until that time we are to get attempt simple things for God and expect great things of God. And when we get muddly, Jesus will be there to help us all the way.

Amen