



Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 9 June 2024

Pentecost 3

**The Rector will preach at St John's
& at St Margaret's:-**

We come into the presence of God, whose ways are beyond our understanding but whose love goes deeper than we can imagine. So let us open our lives in trust, offering our thanks for all God has done and will yet do.

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Mark 3:35

An illustration to set the scene

In May 1980, the World Health Assembly declared the world free of smallpox, a devastating and disfiguring disease that is believed to have existed for over three thousand years.

Widespread vaccination against infection began in England in the early 1800s.

The treatment had been extensively and successfully tested after Dr Edward Jenner's initial cowpox experiment in 1796.

The doctor had shown that injecting a child with lymph from a cowpox blister could protect them from smallpox.

Despite demonstrably healthy outcomes, Dr Jenner's pioneering approach faced immediate public criticism. Some parents feared the treatment itself.

Some clergy believed the vaccine was "unchristian", as it came from an animal.

Rumours circulated that a vaccinated person would turn into a cow.

Some sceptics were mistrustful of medicine in general, and in particular of Dr Jenner's ideas about how disease spread.

Others raised the objection that vaccination violated their personal freedom, especially when the government started introducing mandatory vaccine policies.

Perhaps human beings are always tempted to push back against something that threatens to overturn the ways of our world, even in the face of evidence that it is for our good.

Eradicating smallpox is now hailed as a huge achievement in the field of global public health.

But if the detractors had had their way, misunderstanding and hostility could have halted this life-giving enterprise.

Today's Gospel teaching

In our Gospel reading today, something – or rather someone – is causing a stir.

Mark presents Jesus' activity as creating ripples that go as far south as Jerusalem, from where the scribes have come to investigate what he is doing and claiming.

We see three groups of people impacted by Jesus' preaching and healing: Jesus' family, the religious authorities and the crowd.

Jesus' family cannot understand what has come over the carpenter's son as he begins his anointed ministry.

Their instinct is to restrain Jesus, with the excuse that he has lost his mind.

Their status is threatened by this upstart rabbi's authority.

They cannot deny the evidence of his healings, but try to shut him down with the contentious accusation that his power is not of God, but demonic.

Jesus is quick to expose the illogicality of their position.

Why would evil fight against itself?

He turns to ***picture language*** to get to what is at the heart of the drama on the surface.

As God's chosen one, Jesus is engaged in the ultimate kingdom clash of **light and dark**.

In the parable of the strong man, Jesus is the only power capable of defeating Satan, whose dominion over human affairs is ending.

Some *inevitable turbulence* heralds the incoming reign of God.

It cannot be business as usual.

The third group Mark shows us is the crowd.

Far from wanting to shut down Jesus' ministry, they are captivated by what he is doing.

Perhaps they have less to lose than Jesus' family and the religious establishment.

They welcome the good news, however disruptive.

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

How do we respond to God doing something new?

Are we challenged by change in the Church – perhaps when we see God at work in a fresh way, such as in a young leader or family member?

Perhaps we sense God wanting to change some familiar patterns in our own way of living.

Can we trust what is unfamiliar and perhaps unsettling?

It is fine to express our vulnerability and difficulty with understanding what God is doing.

The only people Jesus condemns are those so determined to reject him that they are prepared to call the Holy Spirit a devil.

We have a choice whether to find some excuse to push Jesus away, or to be open to finding out more.

Jesus commends the crowd who sit humbly at his feet, welcoming them as members of God's family.

A crowd does not always stay the course.

Later, it is a crowd who shout for Jesus' execution over that of Barabbas.

As we choose to trust our Lord from where we are today, we can determine to respond day by day to the invitation to follow the one who makes all things new.

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Mark 3:35