

Title: "Gathering in Brokenness: Mark 1:29-39"

For many Churches today, they will keep the feast of the Presentation in the Temple, or Candlemas. My immediate thoughts do turn to similarities with the prophecies of Simeon and the fulfilling of the Messianic and incarnation presence of God with us, but part of me is drawn to the gospel for the first ordinary Sunday, or Epiphany 5B.

Simeon is aware of the universal human experience of brokenness and the need for healing. It is in the presence of the incarnate God that all things will be made new. However, there may be other gains to be made in the adult ministry of Jesus in our contemplation.

The first chapter of Mark's gospel is full of an incredible amount of drama. Jesus, being near the Jordan river is baptised by John, and then propelled into the desert where he was tempted for 40 days and nights. Jesus then begins his Galilean ministry and calls his first disciples. A man with an unclean spirit identifies him in the synagogue in Capernaum and Jesus forbids the spirit to talk.

Jesus then journeys to the house of Simon and Andrew, where he heals Simon's mother. News soon spreads and the 'entire city' gather at the door. Exhausted, Jesus wanders off for prayer, and then moves the mission onto another place, proclaiming the Good News (Mark 1.1) as required.

It is a sense of duty and calling.

I. Gathered in Brokenness: The healing of Simon's mother in law attracts many comments and jokes, but what is important is the way that Jesus takes her by her hand and raises her up. From being 'arisen', she immediately begins the duties of hospitality. I do not think any antifeminist agenda is at work here, but a restoring of the mother in law's place in community.

What happens next is that news of Jesus presence spreads around the region, and we're informed that "the entire city gathered at the door."

I read one reflection that likens the curiosity and need of the city as being like those who are gathered at the fence, looking through a knot which has been dislodged. Graphic artist and theologian David Perry comments:

“The knot in the fence was a point of weakness and a flaw. At stage it fell out leaving a gaping hole in its place. If all we focus on is the fence then we are stuck with that truth. But what if we see that hole as a window onto another world? It struck me that Jesus enabled people to experience God's presence for themselves in a way that they could then trust themselves to it afresh or indeed for the first time. The face of suffering or despair was imprinted upon the fence panel of their experience, it was within that experience that God met them in Jesus. And that encounter was enough to transform their outlook and expectation.” (TheWorshipCloud.com)

II. Places Jesus Was Present:

Andrew McGowan speaks of the topography of Mark's placement of Jesus' ministry. This is evident in the pilgrimage detailed in the first chapter.

“... the narrative contrasts his actions and his reception in successive places, with different geographical and social characteristics alternating or emphasising the changes.”(Places and Secrets, Andrew's Version 30/01/24)

The sense of pilgrimage is a thought that is strong in my understanding of my own journey of life, and as I prepare for a new ministry in a new place, the need to gather in and be open must be tempered with the need for reflection and prayer. The inclusion into community is hard work.

Commencing a new ministry is always challenging, but there is a sense that like Jesus, there is a gospel to proclaim. There may well be people who are expecting a Messiah who will restore preeminence but what Jesus tends to do is restore people to community.

Assumption and privilege are always at work, but for the beginning of the Good News of Jesus, the sense of being 'driven', be it to the desert or around Galilee is of importance. I wonder occasionally whether or not Jesus would like to stay in the one place. The temptation would be appealing. People were coming to see him when the news spread, but after prayer, he moved on. As he did, the voices of temptation were silenced and the revelation of the incarnate God continued.

The inclusivity of the message and healing beyond a specific location but a universal call to pilgrimage, inclusion and recreation.

Jesus' mission extends beyond physical healing. Jesus restores people to their rightful place in community. The healing of Simon's mother-in-law is a case in point. It was not that 'someone has to do the dishes' but as head of the domestic household, her place was assumed. I would presume that across the eons no person would want to be thought of being less for being ill or indisposed.

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God and liberation from brokenness. The entire city gathering, as it were, looking through the knot hole of Simon's house would be expecting many things. Of those Jesus cured, they were gathered into the presence of Jesus, and their persons re-created. At the end of the day, strengthening again through prayer, the time was there to move on and gather in the lost.

B. Connection to "Gather Us In" by Marty Haugen:

In the hymn, "Gather us in", Marty Haugen captures the essence of both the messianic secret, and the messianic proclamation. The gift of recreation given through healing, wholeness, comfort and strength fires the mission of Jesus. People are made one again. People are made whole. People are restored. People are gathered, but the temptation to hold on to this one moment in time must be overcome. The pilgrimage of proclaiming the kingdom must continue.

*Not in the dark of buildings confining
Not in some heaven light years away
But here in this place the new light is shining
Now is the kingdom, now is the day*

The proclamation of the Kingdom is the pilgrimage that continues. It is the bringing of light into the darkness, and allowing people, even if peaking through a hole in the fence to glimpse the glory that is God incarnate. It is here, and in this place, where we are now, that new light is shining, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now of all days...Amen.

Gather us in Here in this place new light is streaming
Now is the darkness vanished away
See in this space our fears and our dreamings
Brought here to you in the light of this day

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken
Gather us in, the blind and the lame
Call to us now and we shall awaken
We shall arise at the sound of our name

We are the young, our lives are a mystery
We are the old who yearn for your face
We have been sung throughout all of history
Called to be light to the whole human race

Gather us in, the rich and the haughty Gather us in, the proud and the strong Give
us a heart so meek and so lowly Give us the courage to enter the song

Here we will take the wine and the water Here we will take the bread of new birth
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters Call us anew to be salt for the
earth

Give us to drink the wine of compassion Give us to eat the bread that is you Nourish
us well and teach us to fashion Lives that are holy and hearts that are true

Not in the dark of buildings confining Not in some heaven light years away But here
in this place the new light is shining Now is the kingdom, now is the day

Gather us in and hold us forever Gather us in and make us your own Gather us in, all
peoples together Fire of love in our flesh and our bones Fire of love in our flesh and
our bones