

23RD SUNDAY HOMILY



This gospel would have been called ‘Jesus heals the deaf and dumb man’ in the old days, or something like that. But if you have watched the film ‘The Sound of Metal,’ (sorry to get back to films so soon but this one just seemed to fit in) where the drummer in a band increasingly loses his hearing, you start to understand the

complexity of the community that has hearing challenges, and speaking ones. At one point the drummer enters a community of those who mainly use sign language and they have a pride in this. At one scene the signing moves so fast the subtitles for hearing people cannot keep up. There is no desire to get help to hear, and when he chooses to have an implant the community rejects him, (and in fact he finds the results of the implant problematic too).

So, for a start, when we are reflecting on this gospel we need to begin by being aware of assuming that we know what is good for someone else. There are two relationships going on here. Jesus’ relationship with the man and then that with the crowd.

It is the crowd that bring the man to Jesus, believing the man wants to be changed. What strikes me is that, whereas Jesus often chooses to carry out a miracle in front of everyone, here he takes the man aside, to be by themselves.

I would loved to have been a fly on the wall at that meeting. How did Jesus approach him? Establish a rapport? Make the man comfortable? Find out what the man actually wanted as opposed to what the crowd wanted for him? The miracle is all about touch, how did Jesus make the first contact? What was the initial response of the man? Two things I would say about this. Firstly, that it is in the very intimate relationship between them that Jesus builds with the man that miraculous things happen. It is in that encounter, that space, a change takes place. We have to create that space for an encounter with Jesus to take place.

Secondly, rather than make an assumption that what the world thinks is right for him is what the man wants, Jesus would have taken

the time to find out. There are so many people in the world in need of help today. Some are making it clear what they want. But sometimes we assume that we know what is best for them and act on our ideas rather than

theirs as we are not listening to them, giving them time and space to work out what they need.

I did some training with the Samaritans out in Rome, which was with mainly expat women who helped English speakers stuck in Rome. (Quite often we were rung up by bored or fed up Italian army conscript lads in the barracks nearby who were not interested hearing my voice.) But the most difficult part of the training, I found, was learning to listen and not rush in and say, 'If you just did this you would be OK.' Our temptation when we find someone who we see as less fortunate than ourselves is often to rush to judgement and advice, carrying them along in a process that may not wish for. Our second lesson from this gospel might be the need to respect people in need. To listen and to keep their confidence (and realise that we may not be thanked for our intervention).

Now the crowd's approach is less than subtle or thoughtful. They assume they know what is good for the man, and after that they disobey Jesus' request. They cannot help themselves but rush about telling people. They have seen Jesus in action from a distance. Been amazed by his power. But they have not truly encountered him, one to one. Their experience is not a personal one.

As for the man, the only thing that we know about him is that afterwards he speaks clearly.

If we are to look at this in the light of Mark's community and what he might be trying to say to them, yes, it is about the power of Jesus to heal and of his being more than just a gifted person. Pointing towards his divinity.

But we have to remember that the purpose of the gospel is to spread Jesus' message. In gospel terms the ability to speak is not about simple communication but about communicating what God wants people to know about his son and his son's part in our salvation.

So when it says that the man speaks clearly, it means that he has a clarity about who Jesus is, or will have. He will be able to spread the word of God. Why? Because of that personal encounter, which will lead to a much deeper understanding than the general amazement of the crowd.

In the film, the drummer cannot settle because he cannot work out where he now stands in society, and society, including old girlfriends, finds it difficult to place him. Jesus comes across so many people in similar situations and his task is always to explain that they have a home, a place, in and with him.