

(PP1) The Jesus we never knew 2017 x27.

(PP2) How Jesus treats people, including different and difficult people. 02 July_2017.

READ: LUKE 9: 46 - 56. The disciples argue amongst themselves about who is the greatest. Who is mega? Who is of most importance. Inevitably they are also therefore saying others are less important, not as great.

We are spending some weeks thinking about **ways Jesus dealt with people who were different from himself.** And this week we look at the incidents where the disciples argued amongst themselves.

As we seek to follow and learn from Jesus a challenge is presented to us about how we relate to people who are different to us. During the week, quite a few people have spoken to me about the challenge you felt last week by the talk. That's pretty encouraging. Some of you found the: -

(PP3) Question we asked last week significant. Do we see people who are different to us and even difficult as a "gift" – God given and an opportunity for us to grow as people and to grow in holiness?

"Regardless, by growing in holiness we can learn to accept the inconvenient, the incongruent and the bothersome (people and events) in our life not just as necessary nuisances but as gifts." (1)

Amazingly it was in the inner circle of the disciples that there were on occasions differences and difficulties. The argumentative ones it seems were not out-there but very close to home. Even though Jesus and the disciples had been through many trials together they still were on occasion argumentative with one another.

Argument (dialogismos – doubt, dispute, argument) – **on three occasions at least they (PP4) argued and it was about the same thing – who was the greatest among the group of people who followed after Jesus.**

- *Here is one in Luke 9: 46 – 48 (Luke places it after the Transfiguration)*
- *Before Jesus final ministry in Jerusalem Matthew 20: 20 -28 and*
- *Amazingly and maybe even appallingly at the Last Supper Luke 22: 24 fol*

This last argument may well be the reason why Jesus took the role of the servant (*) and washed their feet to teach them by example about humility and mutual love through service. (John 13: 4 – 17). **What's their problem? Well whatever it was it was an ongoing and not just a one-off problem.** It seems to be one of how they viewed themselves in relation to other people. This is a human problem – and one we all have in varying degrees. How did Jesus deal with it when it manifested itself right in the middle of their community? How do we deal with it in ourselves if it manifests itself and how do we deal with it in others?

(PP1) The Jesus we never knew 2017 x27.

(*) *I am among you as one who serves (22:22-27); Matt 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; John 13: 31 – 38.*

The disciples argued: who is the greatest amongst us? Not just who is the most important now but in the future who will become the greatest. (Greek word: mega). This is all about the pursuit of power or status not about achieving excellence.

(*Mohammed Ali* – the heavy weight boxing champion of the world taunted his opponents as he danced around the ring or in interviews before fights – notably ahead of his 1964 world title fight with *Sonny Liston, I am the greatest!* And quite simply at the time – he was the greatest – the heavy weight champion – achieving excellence).

But the disciples were arguing about power and status. Pride was a part of their argument and pride is ugly. **This was also a weakness that kept manifesting itself. The imperfections of the disciples were seen.** There are imperfections in each of us – can we see them? We can often see them in others. What are we doing about those is us? They were bickering and keen for position and importance.

(PP5) What did Jesus do about this? Verse 47 tells us that Jesus knew their thoughts. This means that Jesus understood human nature rather than that he was a mind reader.

1. Amongst those who Jesus had called to follow him and be close to him were those who thought highly of their own importance (AS COMPARED TO OTHERS). Maybe they thought that they had sacrificed or given up more than the others and so were worthier? Peter is over confident and boasts that he will never deny Jesus or let him down. On occasions, he even tries to stop Jesus from pursuing his mission in his way. James and John (nick named the Sons of Thunder because as we see here they have real problems with anger v54 and at heart have the spirit of religious terrorism) want key positions of power in Jesus' Kingdom (*Matt 20:22 – 24 & Mark 10: 35 – 38*). Encouraged by a "tiger mum" they ask to sit on Jesus' right and left in his Kingdom. **What – chutzpah!** Yiddish word for audacity – extreme self-confidence. Was it these 3 or others who argued? We don't know.

Jesus did not ignore the arguments – he challenged their bad behaviour and chutzpah **by taking a small child and placing the child at his side (v47).** So, remember James and John wanted to sit at his right and his left in positions of power and Jesus took a little child and placed him next to him. **He reasons rather than scolds and he shows by example.**

In Jesus' day children were given little regard and had little status until about 12/ 13. Jesus illustrated points using children on a few occasions so we need to be careful we don't conflate all these into just one lesson. On this occasion Jesus stands as an adult male of some reputation and puts a small child next to him – the contrast in size but also status is obvious.

(PP1) The Jesus we never knew 2017 x27.

Then he says, *Whoever WELCOMES this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. (9:48a)*

Now we have said a lot about “welcome” (*dechomai*) in recent years – receiving stranger and hospitality. This is all about how we treat others who may well be very different from us in a whole variety of ways. We have very different personalities and experiences. But Jesus teaches – the way we receive one another and welcome one another is **not just as if the person were Jesus BUT rather we are welcoming Jesus – or not welcoming Jesus.** (Read Matthew 10: 40 – 42).

It takes humility to see Jesus in a little child. (Watoto Choir – “toto” Swahili for little child). Italian little child is bambino or bambina.

(PP6) The least important or smallest among you is the greatest. (9:48b)

In Jesus Kingdom humility and servanthood are signs of greatness. Jesus has humbled himself and become a human being and for a while pitched his tent amongst us. It’s as though he says – self-importance is not valued because EVERYONE is important.

But I think we wrestle with ourselves.

Pride is very difficult to see in oneself. It is ugly which is why we don’t like it in others. But as we read Scripture it can act as a mirror to show us our own hearts – so that we might see and change. It is all too easy to see *the splinter in another’s eye but miss the plank in our own eye*, says Jesus.

Even at the Last Supper (Luke 22: 24 fol) the disciples argued about who was the greatest – the best, the most important, whose motives were purer, who would become the greatest. What chutzpah – what arrogance! Where is the humility and grace?

What does it mean when Paul writes to the Ephesians (6:12) – *we don’t wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness...?* Are these strongholds within us? Or in others? So often they are our own wrong attitudes. We are not really even arguing with someone else but within ourselves. (22: 31 & 32). Jesus prays for us.

Jesus challenges us also to receive others, to welcome others, to treat others as if we were welcoming him, talking with him, receiving him. How? With God’s help and the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

PRAYER used last week (PP7)

JESUS, help me see you in everyone, even the people who challenge me. Light me up with your radiant love so that I may see you even in the most difficult people. Every human being is made in your image. Help me to recognise you in them and love you in them. Amen. (2)