



25th Sunday Ordinary Time Biv
Excerpts From Wisdom 2, James 3 & Mark 9

Last of all

Sometimes we are preoccupied with being first. But today Jesus shows us a different way that is at the heart of his kingdom
Fr David King – 19th September 2021

Please look at the Gospel before reading this (Mark 9.30-37)

1. Karen

Earlier this year I watched a few programmes in a series on channel 5 with Ben Fogle called 'Lives in the Wild'. It was a really interesting series about people that have kind of had enough of the rat race and have decided to jack it all in and live a completely different life, often totally off grid in the middle of these incredible wilderness places. I found it so fascinating seeing the kind of life these people are living, often totally different to ours, but also hearing about what made them make this quite radical decision.

- And one of the programs in particular stuck in my mind. It was about this lady called Karen. Karen was British born, but at 21 years old she moved to Australia and had quite a successful career in media, eventually becoming the director of this big arts festival in Melbourne.
- But in her fifties, she found herself more and more desk-bound and some other desires began to surface in her life. In 2010 she took a trip to the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and out into the Sahara and was just completely blown away by this simple desert life in the middle of these vast open beautiful landscapes. After that trip she knew exactly what she had to do. Within a few months she'd bought a three-acre plot of land on the edge of the Sahara desert, sold up in Australia, and took on the formidable task of building a guest-house there.
- It took her years of work. There was just a tiny little village in this place, completely in the middle of nowhere, there were certainly no roads, or electricity or running water. It looked like something straight out of the bible. But she dug a well, and got to know the local community and hired a few labourers, and got going on this completely new life.
- It really was fascinating, and after getting to know each other a little Ben Fogle asked her about why she had left her successful career in Australia. You could see her struggling to articulate why that was, there was probably a whole host of different reasons and thoughts and feelings, but eventually she said "I always thought there was something other than what I was being offered".
- And I thought that was a really interesting answer. You see there's loads of good things about our lives, of course there are, but then again we all get sucked into power games and competitive games, and all kinds of things in life. We start jostling for status or position. We start being preoccupied with money or home improvements and often we just carry on with all this, without really sitting back and thinking about whether this is really how we want to be living our lives. Yes, there was some shoddy directing on this programme at moments, but generally it was a really interesting and the story was a rare example of someone who stepped back from all the bravado and competition, and took a bold decision not to live like that. And I'm not saying that what she did was virtuous or even necessarily a good thing, not all of us can do that, or would want to, but it was just interesting to see someone intentionally choosing a different way.

2. Colours

- Now the first two readings today are perfect examples of some of the things that we get sucked into in life. And no they don't capture the whole truth, of course they don't, but they certainly have something to say about us human beings. The first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, describes how we get jealous of others, of their goodness, or their success or whatever. And how sometimes, we would even be willing to take them down, completely destroy them and put ourselves on top.
- The second reading from James describes how sometimes we lust after possessions or status until all reason is completely abandoned. Oh yes, we are all nice on the surface aren't we? But let's face it, underneath there's a little Hitler in us all that would be quite prepared to blow up the world to get what we want. People are often quite prepared to drive right over someone in the road to get the house they want, or get their child into the school they want, or get the job they want. Someone said to me recently 'you never know who someone really is until they're buying a house.' With the implication that it's then they show their true colours.
- And then Jesus comes along and proposes a different way. Allow yourself to be on the bottom, says Jesus. It's ok...nothing will happen. You don't need to be threatened by that. And yes we might be preoccupied with being great, but there are more important things, like being a servant to others. Don't let these more important things get side-lined.

3. Kingdom

- That's what today is about. But it's important to take all this one step further. Because to really get and understand what Jesus is saying we have to plug this in to the bigger picture. Jesus is not just dishing out some random good advice here, that's not who Jesus is, he doesn't just dish out good advice, what he's doing is teaching them about what life inside the kingdom looks like.
- Don't forget it is abundantly clear, when Jesus first appears on the scene, what the good news is that he has to announce 'The Kingdom of God is close at hand'. And the backstory is that scriptures spoke of the Messiah who was going to rescue the world, and banish all the bad stuff, and begin the work of putting everything right by establishing God's kingdom on earth. This was what Jesus was talking about, that's what he came to do.
- So, when you hear 'the Kingdom of God', don't think 'heaven', that's not what he's talking about. He was talking about establishing God's kingdom *on earth*. And it's complicated isn't it. Because that kingdom has arrived – we see it wherever there is love and sacrifice and mercy and forgiveness. Wherever Jesus reigns as Lord, that's where the kingdom is. And yet, the kingdom has not yet been established in its fullness – though it will be in time and that is what we look forward to.
- But *now* we can understand what Jesus is saying to his disciples! He's teaching them that in the kingdom, it's not greatness and power that will be honoured, but service and sacrifice and the humility of a small child. This is what the kingdom will look like when it's here in its fullness. And if we live like that now, then we are bringing it about. And that's the crucial point! Jesus is calling us to live like this, because then we are establishing the kingdom on earth and making it present and aiding God in doing what he always meant to do. So think on these things. We don't have to be great. There's a different way. There *is* something other than what we are being offered by the world. And if we live the Jesus way, then we are making his kingdom present.

Jesus, open my eyes to see this different way you call me to. And in living it, may your kingdom come through me.