

**Trinity 12, 27 August 2007**  
**Proper 21**

Jeremiah 1:4-1  
Hebrews 12:18-29  
Luke 13:10-17

Since I was ordained in 2006 I've been struck by the tension between

- finding time to serve parishioners, visits, distressed, funerals, baptisms, preparing talks etc,
- the demands of the institution: deanery meetings, chapter meetings, training meetings, bishop's social events, filling in forms, maintaining the institution

It all gets rather out of hand.

It's a tension that comes across in today's readings: the tension between obeying the rules of the institution, as against the needs of the flock, in this case the woman crippled with disease.

What would Jesus make of all our meetings in the parish, in the MMA, in the deanery, in the diocese, in the church? Would he think that we were putting more energy into maintaining the institution rather than looking after the flock?

There's a hypocrisy (he used that word) about pretending to exist for one thing, but in fact existing for another. Jesus is censorious about very little, but always, always about hypocrisy, pretence, complacency. Today's Gospel tells us clearly that people matter more than rules and institutions. We need to take bold and risky action. I'm free to say things like this because I'm too old to have a career in the church.

We don't need to feel unworthy of such action. Jeremiah: you will be given strength to do what is necessary.

You may say it doesn't matter: in the face of all the things wrong with society and the world, there is nothing any one of us can do, but if we all just concentrate on what is near us, and do-able, then we would make a great deal of difference. We can start with ourselves.

**How do we do this?**

- If you want an abscess to heal quickly, you take the knife to it. Not just sticking plaster. Clean out the diseased tissue. Break into the abscess first.
- We can't heal something if it's not broken. We can't be healed unless we realize the extent of our brokenness: that's what the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension story tells us. And it is that breaking that we will shortly re-enact and take into ourselves in the sacrament of HC.
- The crippled woman in the Gospel asked to be healed. She recognized she was broken.
- We can start this process by doing what Hebrews tells us: getting rid of all the clutter in our minds so that the **unshakable essentials** stand clear.

The clutter in our minds. The shoulds, the conventions, the things we do because our parents expected it of us. The things that prevent us from being free to do God's will, to seek God's will, to align our wills with God's. Things like

- being tethered to old ways
- being concerned more with institutions than people
- not being like children
- Guilt – crippled by guilt (today's gospel)

This will help to rid us of hypocrisy and complacency:

God the disturber. God the shaker-up. God the destroyer.

Perhaps we find peace and redemption only when we have been disturbed enough to see the extent of our pretence. When we've shattered the complacency that stifles: the butterfly emerges only after shattering the constraining case of the chrysalis.