

## **Proper 11, Year B**

Circumcision, sign of club membership. We are all members in the new reign. We are all one in JC. SO what is this JC?

No adjectives for Jesus. Some people claim to know Jesus. Do they? He seems intriguing unpredictable and unpindownable to me.

In our effort to follow in his footsteps, it is worth looking at his style as leader. Three things stand out.

### **Authenticity**

Honesty, truthfulness, integrity. What he says and does are in perfect harmony with who he is. Jesus is truth, Jesus tells the truth and, while he may not distance himself from hypocrites, the gospels time and again show him distancing himself from hypocrisy. He does not twist or manipulate the truth.

Jazz musician Charlie Parker said, 'If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn'. With words that still speak volumes to us today,

Young people have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty. They are not fooled by being patronised.

We see every day in the news how manipulating or stifling the truth does immense harm, both because it does not work and because it is a contradiction of Christianity. It is not the way of Jesus. It rings true when Jesus says, 'If your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light' (Matt 6: 22).

Jesus' gaze is on God, he refers all to the Father; his leadership therefore is not self-regarding. His disciples and companions, too, will be true and honest if they focus on God rather than self. That will require sincere prayer, in which we give God the freedom to show us the opposite of what suits our convenience, the freedom to shatter our preferences. And the heart of our prayer needs to be conversation that is sincere: I need to be willing to look God in the eye, to meet God's gaze. Let all our converse be sincere. No more two-facedness. No more saying one thing to the face and another behind the back.

A Christian community that does not focus on Jesus soon begins to become its own master, to use others for its own convenience and to descend into hypocrisy: it is not authentic.

### **Faith**

As we keep step with Christ we gaze ahead, but without ignoring or downplaying the past; and all in a spirit of faith and courage, imitating Jesus who, says Luke, 'resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51).

Jesus revered the Law and the prophets; at the Transfiguration he is seen conversing with Moses and Elijah: he comes to fulfil the Law. Even after the Resurrection his followers are still treasuring Israel's heritage. But Jesus also speaks of new wine and new wineskins.

The risen Lord challenges the travellers on the road to Emmaus to draw inspiration

from their tradition, but also to walk with him into the future. Use the past to enrich the future.

### ***The compassion of Christ***

Being genuine *companions* (eating together) implies love infused with empathy. Decisions need to be laced with compassion. The discretion/discernment of love.

Marge Simpson. Paul's rhapsody on love:

Love waits patiently, shows kindness. Love is not jealous, does not brag, is not 'puffed up', does not behave improperly, does not seek self-interest, doesn't get provoked, doesn't reckon up evil, doesn't rejoice at injustice, but rejoices at integrity. Love copes with everything; is always committed, always hopeful, always endures to the end; love never collapses.

God's compassion embraces the crowd. He had compassion on the multitude (Mark 6:34) and he longed and longed to gather Jerusalem and her children together as a hen gathers her chicks.

The characteristic backdrop for Jesus' leadership is not a parade-ground, but a **meal**. When he imparts leadership to Peter it is in the imagery of **shepherding**: a preference for the intimate and the personal touch rather than dragooning.

Dorothy L. Sayers:

A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised ... who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension ... with no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend.[5]

Mary McAleese, Elizabeth II: none of them have had much power exactly, but they have exercised leadership, and it is clear that in large measure Christ's attitude and values are their model.

What makes Jesus' leadership and example so powerful is that his compassion runs so deep that it is inseparable from a spirit of *service*. A British Army general said he was convinced that the key to leadership lay in this gospel text: 'The greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves ... here am I among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:26).

Because Jesus serves without seeking power, he himself empowers, he sets free others' potential.

The demands of Christian leadership are high, but we will come closer to meeting them if we are people preoccupied with the *compassion* of Christ, speaking with the *honesty* of Christ, in a *spirit of faith* to build for the future.