

Sermon on Sunday 6 June (online) **by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship**

(Gospel - Mark 3: 20-34)

This gospel reading is complicated and challenging, and it's difficult to explain why Jesus appears to turn his back on his own family in favour of his new-found disciples and followers. So I'm going to sidestep that bit and focus on what Jesus says just before we get to that part. Jesus says something very profound: He talks about how a divided house cannot stand; a divided kingdom will crumble and this is very relevant to today's world.

Imagine this scene: I'm sitting in the board room of a major international manufacturing company. I'm a business journalist and I'm interviewing the chief executive. We cover the usual touch points - company performance, future sales growth, shareholder dividend, that sort of thing.

This significant business leader is outwardly confident and decisive and he answers my questions with authority. But I want a bit more than just the state of his nation.

When I was a journalist and I interviewed senior managers, I tried to move away from their corporate success and get beneath the skin of the man or woman that they really were. What was going on in their personal life? How were their children? Where did they like to go on holiday? What were

their personal ambitions? What would they have chosen to do if they weren't the head of a major corporate business (professional golfer was the most common answer). What worried them?

On this occasion, as I probed away, my subject - or should I say victim - became quiet; he looked into the middle distance and then he turned to me and said (off the record): 'What many people fail to realise is that senior managers are human and what most of us fear most is that we are going to be found out.'

I later came to realise that he was right; that it's a common fear amongst many, if not most, icons of success. It's called imposter syndrome. They all have those two-o'clock-in-the-morning moments when they wake up thinking that *today is the day that my true identity is going to be revealed. That everyone in my life is suddenly going to realise that I'm not confident and decisive after all. I am human and fragile and scared of messing up. Sometimes I feel like two people.*

From the beginning of his ministry, as told by St Mark, Jesus had been dealing with people who felt and behaved like two people. He had cast out demons, healed Peter's mother-in-law, cleansed a leper and caused a paralytic to walk. These people were divided. Their lives were not their own. They lived with inner conflict and turmoil. Their outer conditions of illness and paralysis point to an inner conflict; the battle with health and disease.

This division and inner conflict is a reality of today's world. A marriage divided is a divorce. A nation divided results in vitriolic politics and, in the extreme, civil war. An economy divided yields poverty and injustice. A community divided generates tribalism, prejudice and violence.

Don't we all know what it's like to experience division in our own lives? Don't we all know those times when our outsides and our insides don't match up? That's what it means to be a house divided. We have a tendency to be one person at work another at home. We act one way with certain people and a different way with other people. We are one person in reality and another person on Facebook. Life gets divided into pieces. Behaviour, beliefs, and ethics become situational. There is the work life, the family life, the prayer life, the personal life, the social life. Pretty soon, if we're not careful, we're left with a bunch of different lives.

But Jesus stands before us in this morning's gospel, and always, as an image of unity, wholeness, integration. He is one person, consistent at all times and with all people. And he can help us be the same. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He can put our lives and houses back into a consistent symmetry. Christ offers a different image of what life might look like. But he does this by revealing the division in our lives, the houses that cannot stand, and the crumbling of our kingdoms.

It's uncomfortable sometimes. It's hard to look at the division and inner conflict within our own lives, but the beginning of wholeness starts by acknowledging brokenness. It takes

courage. It took courage for my business leader to confess to a journalist what was really on his mind. He dropped his guard and I could tell that he regretted immediately what he'd said. I did respect that and, for once, what was off the record remained off the record.

But it raised a question for me: is my own house divided and, if so, where is it divided? How and to what extent have I created conflict and division within my relationships? In what ways do I live a fragmented life, parcelling out pieces here and there? What is it that is in danger of shattering my life? Anger and resentment, greed, insecurity, perfectionism, sorrow and loss? Fear, envy, guilt, loneliness? Only I and God have the ability to know the answer. And only I, with God's help, have the ability to mend the cracks in my house, which I know, from personal experience, exist.

That is why the first part of this morning's gospel is very poignant to me.

So, Lord, help me to examine my own house and face my brokenness and impurity and help me to mend the cracks.
Amen

