

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
26 February, 2006

1. **Mark presents Jesus as someone asking for trouble.** Last week we heard of the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus forgiving sins. In today's Gospel, Mark 2.13-22, Jesus provokes opposition because he mixed with sinners, and flouted the laws on fasting.
2. **Again we see that the conflict is about Jesus' challenge to the priestly code of holiness.** "Impure" tax-collectors mixed with gentiles and were dishonest with money; yet Jesus befriended them. Jesus' disciples didn't fast as the Law required. Jesus' cryptic words about new cloth and new wineskins point to the overturning of old ways. The old insistence on the holiness of God and the holiness of his people is to be overthrown by Jesus who points to a different view of God and a different view of what God wants from us.
3. **The idea of a compassionate God was not new.** Hosea's own experience of marriage was a parable of wayward Israel in its relationship with God who is tender, compassionate and ever faithful. Hosea 2.14-20 shows God's tenderness and compassion, his forgiveness and giving of hope as the relationship is restored "in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy".
4. **We are called to be compassionate like Christ.** According to Paul (2 Cor. 2.14-3.6) we are persons sent by God and standing in his presence". Paul extends the metaphor. We are letters, our hearts inscribed with the living Spirit of God—a spirit of compassion and tenderness which befriends the outcast, and calls people to righteousness.
5. **How wrong are the views about God of many people today!** May those who think him judgmental and wrathful see in us compassion, mercy and tenderness and so come to know that we are compassionate, taught by Jesus to be as God is.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
5 February, 2006

1. **How big is our God?** The enthusiastic poetry of Isaiah (Isa. 40.21-31) captures the wonder, excitement and the hugeness of God in memorable world pictures. God is so big that all the oceans fit in his palm. The powerful nations of the earth are like a drop in a bucket or dust which weighs nothing. We are like grasshoppers!. He is strong, everlasting, tireless, complete in his understanding.
2. **Yet this powerful, Creator has time for us.** "He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless." This good news becomes a reality in the person of Jesus. Mark presents Jesus doing just that in his first chapter. Today's gospel, Mark 1.29-39 shows the lifting up of the sick, the casting out of demons. Mark does not bother with birth stories and explanations about Jesus. He is anxious to get to the point quickly. Jesus spoke and acted authoritatively. He broke into creation with creative power giving to little people, the sick and the demon-possessed.
3. **Jesus himself was** enthusiastic about the liberation he was bringing to the ill and demon-possessed. The people greeted him with enthusiasm—"the whole city was gathered around the door"; "everyone is searching for you". Jesus himself was anxious to move on to the neighbouring towns in Galilee to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God and to be good news himself in his liberating power.
4. **In Paul we meet another enthusiast.** He'll do anything to spread the good news about Jesus. He says "I have become all things to all people" in order to win them over for the sake of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9.16-23)
5. **How big is our God?** How enthusiastic are we for the sake of the gospel? How willing are we to mix with people unlike ourselves in order to share with them the blessings of Christ? How willing are we to tell how great God is?

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
12 February, 2006

1. **We all know about dress codes.** –no singlets or thongs etc. Hotels, clubs, SACCA grounds all impose codes in order to preserve perceived standards. How awful it feels to be turned away because you have not measured up. Spoken or unspoken codes apply in many areas of life.
2. **The Temple had its own code** of holiness. Ritual cleanness was regulated to preserve the purity of the Temple and those who worshipped there. Lepers were ritually unclean and outcast. There were stringent rules to prevent contagion, and certification from a priest was necessary before a healed leper could participate in society. The leper's approach to Jesus was forbidden by the Law. (Mark 1. 40-45)
3. **So why did Jesus break the Law?** "If you choose, you can make me clean," said the leper. He had seen Jesus' compassionate and authoritative dealings with illness and demon-possession. He probably guessed Jesus' response –"moved with pity" and he knew from the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5.1-14) that healing came from trusting in the word of a man of God. Compassion was Jesus' code, not holiness.
4. **Which code do we follow:** the code of holiness or the code of compassion? When do we as individuals or as a Church touch the 'untouchables' of our community? Will we welcome people to mingle among us only when they wear the right clothes or behave in the right way? The noisy child in church? People of different backgrounds? Those in need of food and clothing?
5. **In the Collect for today we pray** for the gifts of compassion and self control that in serving others we may receive the reward of eternal life (the imperishable wreath—1 Cor. 9.24-27) Compassion is our code.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
19 February, 2006

1. **Things we have done or haven't done or what others have or haven't done to us** can distort our lives. Some people remain sad, have low self-esteem, act continually like a victim, or distrust others so that they seem paralysed and unable to move forward in their lives. Maybe this has been your experience too at some stage of your life. Such is the power of *blame* and *guilt* of sin to constrain us
2. **The nature of God is to liberate people** bound by the sins of the past. Isaiah 43.18-25 "I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins". God's very nature is to forgive and to make things new.
3. **The truth of God's nature is revealed in Jesus.** Mark's gospel show Jesus revealing God as the one who heals, forgives, restores and liberates. Mark 2. 1-12. "Your sins are forgiven" provoked outrage because only God can forgive sins but for Jesus healing and forgiveness were interlinked. "Do you want me to act in the power of God to heal or in the power of God to forgive?" What Jesus said freed the paralytic to move into the future. His freedom to walk was an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual truth of forgiveness.
4. **Who are you in the story of the paralysed man?** Are you so paralysed by guilt and blame that you cannot even ask for forgiveness? Are you someone going to extraordinary lengths to bring your suffering friend to Jesus? Or are you questioning in your heart that Jesus has such authority and power?
5. **In Jesus every one of God's promises is a Yes,** Paul reminds us (2 Cor. 1.16-22). Through him we say *Amen* to the absolution offered to us. (see p.120 **APBA**)