

Jesus breaks in to give us his sight

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Wondering with children inside an egg: Mark 8.31-38 – Lent 2 2021

Have you ever seen a bird hatch out of its egg – a bird or a crocodile or a tortoise or a caterpillar? It's a big change for them, isn't it. One moment, tiny living space, next minute, the whole world!

Imagine if you were in an egg and it was time for you to hatch. Everything you know is inside your shell. It lets light in from outside, and warmth and cold. That's all you feel and see inside your egg – and probably you don't know you're going to be in a world bigger than ever you dreamed possible. Your imagination is shaped like the inside of an egg. I wonder how it'll be just after you've hatched. Your world has been replaced – your imagination has cracked open – open to forever.

We'll hear two stories today about people hatching out of their imaginations. God tries to tell Abraham and Sarah what's outside their shells. And Jesus does the same with us. We don't understand all that well, but God is patient; Jesus is patient.

Abraham and Sarah are both very old, but God tells them they're about to become parents anyway. You might just hear them chuckling in their shells.

Jesus' friends had heard him talking about God's Kingdom. They hoped Jesus would become their king, because he was good and kind and wise; much better than the one they had. They knew what a king should be like. But they didn't understand what

sort of king Jesus is, or how amazingly different his Kingdom is. They hadn't hatched out of their thought-shells yet.

Today, we'll hear Jesus help to crack their shells for them so he can show them what God's Kingdom is like. Even though he's their king, he'll be treated badly, crucified and killed – but after three days, he'll rise again. They don't like the sound of this. It's not like they imagine. They try to shut their shells again and stay inside. But it won't work. God's Kingdom doesn't wait for us to break out of our eggs. God's Kingdom breaks in, and shows us that we live in something much more wonderful than we could ever have imagined. So let's hear these stories.

Lent 2 – 28-2-21 Genesis 17 1-7, 15-16 – Mark 8 (22-30) 31-38

Lots of people have trouble reading the Gospel set for today. What Jesus says is really confronting – confronting for us just as much as it would have been for the original twelve. Here, Jesus calls himself the Son of Man – one of the titles of the Messiah – God's anointed – the one who, in Daniel 7.13-14, is proclaimed as everlasting sovereign of the Earth. But Jesus says this Son of Man is going to be tortured, killed and then raised from the dead. In saying this, he dumps everything they'd grown up thinking about the one they expected – the Messiah. No wonder Peter reacts like he does, and no wonder Jesus has to reject so forcefully the temptation of Peter's contradiction. He knows what his path is; self-denial and utter loyalty. And he knows its cost – for him, and for any who would follow him.

When Jesus turns to talk to the crowd – and that means us too – he claims the same self-denial and loyalty from us – even to the point of losing our life for his sake. He challenges us head on. As one writer puts it, *We too are scandalized by a crucified Messiah. We too look upon discipleship as a fulfilling and pleasing life-style. We too expect success and approval rather than defeat and ignominy. We too want to raise*

the approval of our faith in the eyes of the world, and enable the church of Jesus Christ to be seen as a positive and admired institution. ^{Leonard Vander Zee} So these words are as hard for us to hear as they were for their first hearers

We're being challenged to wake up to an unfamiliar faith journey today. That's why I talk with the children about hatching out of an egg. It's the closest analogy I can come up with for what Mark is saying today. Jesus is asking us, his disciples to follow him out of the world as we see it and into a Kingdom we cannot yet see. He is asking utter trust and courage from us; the sort we met in Abraham and Sarah.

We get a vivid image of this transformation when you remember the last things we saw in this chapter of Mark's gospel before we rejoined Jesus and his disciples on the road today. (Mark 8.22-30) It's when Jesus gave sight to a blind man. It's a beautiful story.

When Jesus and his disciples arrived in the village of Bethsaida, the locals bring the blind man to Jesus and ask if he might touch him.

Jesus does better than that; he takes the blind man by the hand and leads him out of the village. Then he puts some saliva on the man's eyes, lays his hands on him, and asks the man if he can see anything. The man looks up and says, 'I can see people, but they look like trees walking.' Jesus lays his hands on his eyes again. The man's sight is restored and he sees everything clearly. Then, sending him home, Jesus tells him not even to go into the village.

Today, Mark challenges all of us to leave behind our settled ways of seeing things – and by that, he means our spiritual blindness – and to open our ears and our eyes to what has been proclaimed since the beginning of this gospel; 'The Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.' ^{Mk 1.14} Repent means to turn around; walk the other way. To walk the

Christian path means a complete 180° turn from the type of power we humans currently honour. Mark makes this point by setting *today's story ... in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, a city built by Herod Philip to honour the emperor who'd given him this area to rule ... a city built to celebrate worldly power.* Leonard Vander Zee

In this of all places, Jesus decides to tell us that he and everyone who follows in his way must turn from what such a city represents – the self-focussed pursuit of power and influence. We must turn from that, pick up the Cross of Christ, and tread unashamedly, in his footsteps; tread the path of caring for others, walking alongside the poor, the outsider, the vulnerable; revealing the Good News of God's love.

It's not always straightforward; not always crystal clear. Like that blind man after Jesus first touched him, we may well also see walking trees, or be seen as walking trees. (cf *The Land of Walking Trees* by Michael Hansen – a book of meditations for people suffering chronic illnesses) But Jesus can see so much more than we can, and stays with us to help us see just as far – just as well.

Remembering our egg analogy, we don't often willingly break out into the Kingdom to take hold of these things, so the Kingdom breaks in to us – gently. Like Jesus did with that blind man – breaks in so Jesus can give his sight to us as well. Thanks be to God for loving us so dearly.

Amen