

Eucharist: Participating in the mystery

## 2 The Vision That Drove Jesus

Last time we looked at the tradition Jesus inherited; where his cultural roots came from. We looked at the covenant tradition that made the Jews a Passover people. Exodus and Passover were a leap of genius for a community that found in its history of suffering the plan for a nation in which no-one would endure the alienation of the slavery that they had experienced.

Tonight we look at the vision that drove Jesus.

When reading the Gospels we are often reminded to take care to be aware of the community from which the document arose. In Matthew we find a degree of anti Jewish polemic because the community of Jewish Christians is going through the painful process of being excluded from the life of mainstream Judaism. Some of the criticism is in the prophetic tradition of polemic against those who do not uphold the spirit of Passover. This can make us forget not just the obvious point that Jesus was Jewish, but that he loved his people, he loved Jerusalem. He wept for the city and the people and he never abandoned them, even when that love lead him to death on the cross.

Frank Andersen contends that we do well to consider that in the first instance Jesus's death was for his community rather than for the world or God.

## Jesus Baptismal Decision

Father Frank puts Jesus at the end of the tradition of prophesy in Jewish thought. The role of the prophet in Jewish religious life had been to highlight the difference between the covenant commitment they had made as a nation and the realities of life in that community where huge divides existed between the righteous and the sinner, the acceptable and the outcast. Father Frank looks at a few prophets, Amos is a good example.

Amos was a shepherd from Judah who was active as a prophet in the Northern kingdom, Israel about 750 BCE. He had a call to prophesy against the evil he saw in the community ruled by Jeroboam II.

Listen, sons of Israel, to this oracle Yahweh speaks against you,  
against the whole family I brought out of the land of Egypt. 3.1

because they have sold the virtuous man for silver and the poor man  
for a pair of sandals, because they trample on the heads of ordinary  
people and push the poor from their path. 2.6-7

you have trampled on the poor man, extorting levies on his wheat.  
5.11

Go to Bethel, and sin.  
To Gilgal and sin your hardest!  
Offer your sacrifices each morning  
and you tithes on the third day,  
burn leavened dough as a sacrifice with praise,  
announce your voluntary offerings, make them public,  
for this is what makes you happy, sons of Israel. 4.4-5

Jesus is in this tradition. He sees the reality of life as failing the covenant commitment which shapes his vision. He sees the economic, class and purity issues which divide the nation. Having grown up with the word of the covenant and

having seen the prophetic tradition in real life with John the Baptist he makes a response with his baptism.

Rather than the approach of the Essenes who rebelled by separating further from society to recreate a just community, Jesus takes the opposite and altogether more radical decision to be one with the outcasts and sinners. His baptismal response is to become a living expression of covenant. He chooses to live with, eat with, speak to the outcast and so restores them to community. Father Frank puts it, “He was baptised...toward the sick, the oppressed, and the alienated.” 27

I shall stand at my post

I shall station myself on my watchtower Hab 2.1

**VIDEO**

### *Hesed*

Love, in the sense of loving kindness, mercy, tenderness or compassion. It speaks of a God whose heart is capable of being deeply moved when confronted by human suffering and need. This is a God with a “heart of flesh” (Ez 36.26), who is deeply hurt by the nation’s infidelities (Hos 2). It is a love that washes feet; it speaks of a body that is *given* for you.

### *Emet*

A word with the basic meanings of *true* and *faithful*. It is a word that expresses the constant fidelity of God’s love for us, a love on which we can afford to depend. It attempts to capture the *changeless* nature of God’s love; when paired with *hesed*, they are often translated as *faithful love*. It names the *truthfulness* of God’s commitment to us, a loyalty that will never waver. It speaks of blood that is *poured out* for you.

### Andersen 28-9

Jesus lives his baptismal commitment. Others respond to the experience of being accepted and respond likewise. Those that were beyond community, become community, the Kingdom of God.

Healing is an example of this acceptance and inclusiveness.

A leper came to him and pleaded on his knees: “If you want to,” he said, “you can cure me.” Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. “Of course I want to!” he said. “Be cured.” And the leprosy left him and he was cured. Mark 1.40-3

Leprosy in this era is a skin disease like psoriasis that makes you obviously imperfect and therefore a sinner. Touching a leper has made Jesus ritually impure and he is now an outcast himself.

Jesus heals him...by taking him into a community of the marginalised and disenfranchised — into, in fact, the Kingdom of God. (Crossan 83)

## Baptism and Community

In many stories from the community that created Mark's gospel we see the inclusiveness Jesus showed within the Jewish community extended to Gentiles.

The healing of the daughter of a Syrophenician woman in Tyre (Mark 7.24-30) extends Jesus mission outside the Jews.

The Gerasene demoniac is from the Greek influenced area of decapolis. (Mark 5.1-20) Jesus cures him and he becomes "a missionary for the heathen and he had so gratefully received from Jesus." (Andersen 30)

Even a key declaration by Peter of his belief that Jesus was the Christ (Mark 8.27-30) occurs in the Roman city of Caesarea Philippi.

This extension of inclusiveness from Jews to gentiles was the great achievement of the early Church which was worked through with much thought and pain by James, Peter and Paul and the council of Jerusalem.

## Inclusiveness and Liturgy

Issues:

- Where do people sit?
- Who is the priest speaking on behalf of?
- Over what and whom is the consecration performed?
- Whose life is offered?
- Does the music include the people?
- Who is welcomed?
- Who is welcoming ?

A community of hesed and emet is hope in a divided world.

Eucharist celebrates our baptism and furthers it, but depends on the hesed and emet of Christ being expressed in the liturgy.