

Donnybrook

17 January 2022

Welcome

At the moment, I'm reading a book of short stories called Blank Pages, by Bernard McLaverty. It is a very enjoyable read – he's a keen observer of the minutiae of life, the extreme every day. Enjoyable and recognisable. A feature across the stories is something unsettling, something uneasy. Individually you might notice it; after reading a few, it makes a big impact.

Topic

Something similar might be said about the stories in chapters 2 and 3 in Mark's Gospel.

Steps

The surrounding stories show Jesus disturbing the conventionally religious in different ways – he offers forgiveness of sins, he eats with a sinner, he breaks the Sabbath not once but twice. In the centre in our Gospel today: it is a defence and a permission. Obviously, you can't fast at a wedding, so the old practices are no longer adequate. Even more, the new teaching of Jesus is compared to new wine – and new wine is to be stored differently and to be enjoyed differently. In a word, because of who Jesus is, time-honoured, even God-given rules are to be set aside.

Can that be relevant today? I think it can, both at a personal level as a believer and within the community of faith. In fact, we are already doing it very much on the personal level. If you are old enough, you will have realised that much that we received when we were younger no longer makes sense – at the level of faith and the level of practice. A parade example would be belief in Limbo, both there are many others, including the overriding sense of sinfulness and guilt.

At community level, in term of church ministry and government, much needs to change. We have our chance to let our voices be heard in the synodal pathways. Many leaders are cautioning that the synod is not about doctrines or canon law – perhaps wise cautions given the level of resistance to change. But still, this is our chance to dream and our chance to bring about long-needed change and reformation.

Conclusion

As we reflect on our faith, our practices and our convictions, we should keep in mind the words of Jesus: New wine, new wineskins!