

The Hole in the Roof

Luke 5:17-26

Which one of us wouldn't tear a building apart to save the life of someone we love? Which one of us would not be willing to cut through established conventions or the rules of the game for family and friends?

Jesus seems to have a soft spot for people who come at him from odd angles – Zacchaeus and his tree, the friends of the paralysed man coming through a roof. In the latter case, these guys crash into a conversation expecting and hoping for action. ‘Enough of the chat, can you do something for our pal?’ It is one of the funniest stories in the New Testament which I have always regretted not being included in the Passion Play hosted in St Margaret’s a number of years ago. The assembled gathering is described as pharisees and teachers of the law gathered from a wide area - the great and the good, no doubt discussing the finer points of law and custom. Surrounding them was the crowd that our guys on the roof could not get through.

Crowds of people can be an unattractive phenomenon. Anxious crowds can strip supermarket shelves bare and behave quite irrationally. They can become violent and, in the Gospels, Jesus relates to crowds in different ways – dispersing them, feeding them, turning on them to highlight the cost of following him. On occasions he withdraws from them, but he always comes back. The Gospels are replete with stories of crowds pressing in on him. If he had been British, Jesus may have insisted on orderly queues, one of a number of ways to impose order on chaos. But he wasn’t and, in these times, crowds were potentially dangerous. Then there are the characters who, in different ways, negotiate their way through crowds to get some kind of vantage point, whether from a tree or as in this reading, by dismantling a roof. Then there was the woman who touched the garment of Jesus and hoped to quietly slip away, physically healed but with an unchanged status. Jesus will have none of it, he turns, creates a space in the crowd with her at the centre and he calls her daughter. No more skulking in the shadows for her.

Right now, crowds have become challenging in another way. We can make each other ill by spreading a virus. There may come a time when people will have the worry of wanting someone they love to get the attention they need. We would want to tear through buildings if it would make a difference. If we follow the trajectory of Italy or Spain, some doctors and nurses will give their lives trying to help us. Our current inconvenience is as nothing to the pain of grief. Keeping a distance from each other is the right thing to do. Even Jesus withdrew from the crowds every once in a while. But he always came back, again and again and gave of himself until it cost him his life.

On the TV the other night they showed a clip of a medical team in Spain or Italy removing a ventilator from someone who could breath on their own again. A success story, they were jubilant, cheering and applauding. The best of us doing their best for us. Good on them!

Lord be with all those doctors, nurses, social workers and carers in the days ahead. We thank you for them, may we never take them for granted and may they be resourced to do the work they need to do. Give them strength when they feel weary and courage when they are frightened. Help us to cope well with our differing degrees of isolation, help us to play our part in stopping the spread of the virus.

In Jesus Name

Amen

