

St. Brandon's 18 July 2021

Ephesians 2: 11-20 and Mark 6: 30-34 and 53-56

Good News

Over the past 16 months our everyday lives have been dominated by **news** in an unprecedented way.

Announcements, pronouncements, press statements.

Regulations and guidelines, statutory or voluntary, logical or baffling?

Experts, advisers, ministers – of government and religion!

There's been a lot of news, not all of it good, by any means.

But today I want to focus on **Good News**.

Good News from our Bible Readings; Good News about Jesus.

Who he is, what he has done and still does in our broken and ravaged world today. This

Good News about Jesus links directly to Reese's baptism, which we celebrate today.

In the gospel reading Wilfred just brought us, we have two short 'bookends' from Mark chapter 6. In the middle, not read today, lies the story of the Feeding of the 5000: you know the one where Jesus feeds a huge crowd with a young boy's picnic, 5 loaves and two fish? These bookend verses often get lost, but what jumps out from them is that Jesus is a real human being, who feels tired and hungry, needs a break and understands that his friends do too. Jesus is travelling throughout Galilee,

meeting people wherever he goes. Already he's famous, recognised by the crowds, so he uses the boat, Peter's possibly, as a way to find space, either out on the lake itself or on a distant shore.

Here is **Good News** for us all, and for Reese as she is baptised- Jesus understands *our* lives: the pressures, frustrations, choices and challenges we face every day.

Of course, Jesus could have asked his friends to act as bouncers (those fishermen were probably quite a burly lot), could have protected himself and his inner circle as celebrities tend to, could have excluded the crowds.

More **Good News**: Jesus embodies the best of humanity: in his compassion for the crowds, who are 'like sheep without a shepherd.' And he embodies the power and love of God, as he teaches and heals people, and performs a miracle at teatime too. We see that Jesus especially has time for the people who get excluded- children, old people, those who are ill and frail.

Who is Jesus? He's both fully human and fully God – the one who was and is **Good News**. The one Reese, at her baptism today, turns to as her Saviour and trusts in as her Lord, supported by her parents and godparents.

Now let's think about the other facet of Good News- what Jesus has done and still does in our broken world.

For this we turn to our first reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, which we began last week. If you're a regular, we'll be reading Ephesians every week until the end of August and it is brilliant- try reading it all at home.

I hope you didn't switch off in the opening sentences of today's passage about circumcision- though you can be forgiven if you did!

The thing is, in the ancient church in Ephesus, one of earliest and biggest to be established in first century Asia Minor, circumcision was a big deal. (Ok - it always is!) Symbolically, circumcision was THE sign of the Jewish nation's special relationship with God, set apart as his people, chosen and blessed. This wasn't just a symbol, but a real and lasting sign which every Jewish male carried, bodily, for life.

Now when Jesus came to earth he brought Good News not just for the Jews but for everybody, Jews and Gentiles- circumcised and uncircumcised. Good News for his own people- Jesus was a circumcised Jewish male himself- and good news for everyone outside, 'far off' from God as the reading puts it.

Because through Jesus, every single person in the world and through all time, each one created, known and love by God, is welcomed home to be part of God's household or family, the church. There is a sign for this too: again, not just a symbol but a physical sign, excruciatingly costly and painful. It's the sign of the cross. *Instead of circumcision, as*

Christians

we have the cross.

We have the cross of Jesus, both fully human and fully divine, who bridged and bridges the gulf between God and humanity, caused by our selfishness and sin.

In this church we have a charred cross above the archway, often remarked on by visitors, such a powerful sign and reminder. Unlike more ornate crosses, it speaks of the pain and suffering when this church was burned down, out of which came new life, hope and beauty. What happened to this building, restored from ruins, can happen in our lives too, through Jesus' death on the cross.

We have the cross on which Jesus's body is stretched and broken, so we can be forgiven and forgive one another. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously put it, there is 'No future without forgiveness'. How that is needed in our broken world today.

Finally, *we have the cross* on which Jesus opens his arms of love to each of us, calling us to be God's child, for ever. In a moment, as the first symbol in the Baptism service, I'll make the sign of the cross on Reese's forehead in oil – oil that stands for the healing and peace Jesus has brought us, through dying for us on the cross.

Good News, today and for every single day of Reese's life, whatever it may hold.

Good News for all who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. Amen.