

Devotional Blog

Sunday 6th June

Conspiracy theories are all the rage these days. In fact, they always have been, but social media has supercharged their spread.

Famous events, deaths and assassinations are popular generators of conspiracy ideas. The death of Princess Diana, the assassination of John. F. Kennedy, the 1969 Apollo Moon landing, the 9/11 terrorist attack are prime examples. Alongside these we hear of numerous theories of alleged plots for world domination, most recently involving Bill Gates and the Coronavirus vaccine programme.

There's plenty of conspiracy theories about Christianity. They range in motivation from the simple desire to see it as out of date to the claim that Christianity is dangerous and counter to individual well-being, state control, or world peace.

This is nothing new!

Indeed, there's a rather shocking story in Mark's Gospel (Mark 3:20-25) when to Jesus's face it is claimed that he is either mad or in league with the Devil. Why shocking? Well, the first claim comes from Jesus' own family, while the Devil claim comes from the religious leaders of the day.

The background to this story is in the odd feature of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is open to everyone: Gentiles, Jews, the poor, the demonic, the sick, the working class, women, tax collectors, sexual outcasts, and so on. Is this a sign of madness, or the Devil at work? The passage is a drama portraying the difficulties of discerning between good and evil.

We, of course, know the next stage in the drama, but if we bring the story up to date it's not so easy to discern. Who are the ones crowding around Jesus today, in place of the lepers and the demoniacs? Could it be disabled and homeless children in the world's war zones; the left behind poor around the globe; or the victims of addiction?

When we think about who is near Jesus, we get a shock, for it is not the morally perfect. It's just the diverse mass of humanity with all its physical, spiritual beauty and imperfections. Perhaps the only ones not desperate to be near Jesus are those who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like.

Just like The Jews of the first century we live in troubled times, and we try our best to figure out how to be faithful. But the Holy Spirit is wild and disturbing and comes to us in unfamiliar forms.

Is same sex love a breeze from the Holy Spirit or a sign of a disintegrating society? Are feminine images of the Divine crazy and demonic or perfectly valid? What if we make the wrong discernment? What if we can't agree?

It may well be that the reality check is in the Gospel itself. The whole background to our shocking Bible passage is healing. Remember, it was healing that drew the broken to Jesus. Maybe if we had a bit more compassion for our own wounds, and the wounds of others we might find ourselves in the crowd devoted to Jesus, instead of being taken in by the conspiracy theories that run counter to our belief in Christ.

That crowd around Jesus in the Gospel story was highly diverse but was united in their need for Jesus' healing. Jesus saw them as his real family. We today can reflect that unity. Unity not in the administrative style of faithfulness, but in loving toleration to differing viewpoints on worship, music, and even discernment of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We may be wounded from living in this broken world, but we crowd around Jesus for his healing, love, and salvation. We are his family now!

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