

Epiphany 2

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42

Mission, Conversion, Peace, and the Lamb of God

Introduction

In 1961, the British journalist, Michael Parkinson interviewed Martin Luther King, in the program Face-to-Face, for BBC Television. The interview was compelling, in that it provided an opportunity for the public to hear about King's personal journey: his faith journey, his social journey, his political journey: these three journeys which preceded his coming to fame, to notoriety. In the clip that we have just heard, we listen to the early events with regard to the Bus Boycott in Montgomery Alabama, that the Afro-American community unanimously promoted and adhered to for well over 12 months, even in the face of resistance from the white community: state and local government, as well as the citizenry.

The witness of King is important to us, for a range of reasons, but there is one in particular which I think stands out: and that is that for King, Christian mission must always have practical, concrete ends, but not any ends, *particular* concrete ends: Christian mission in Jesus Christ, is always about justice amid peace, peace amid justice. For King, both, as elusive as they are, nevertheless always coincide. Peace, real peace can only occur with the foundation of genuine social justice. In turn, justice, real justice can only occur with the foundation of genuine peace. Justice, real justice, generates genuine peace, and peace, real peace, generates genuine justice. In persevering in the battle for both, King used to compose, console himself with the oft-used statement, that "the moral arc of the universe is long, but bends toward justice." Peace and justice – if genuine – coincide, confirm each other.

This morning I want to explore the question of *conversion, mission, peace and justice* for these are the themes which emerge, which dominate in the season of Epiphany, through the months of January and February.

The Gospel Reading

In the Gospel reading today, we hear about conversion. What is especially interesting about conversion in our story, is the way in which it begins with curiosity. The two nameless potential disciples, are driven by Jesus' invitation to "come and see". But to see what? Presumably, that for which Jesus stands, that which gives his life and presence meaning. In other words, to even consider following this man, to even consider taking him seriously, the initial challenge is to understand what he exemplifies, represents, symbolizes. The enticement, the lure to "come and see" is too much for *them* to ignore. But what does Jesus stand for? What stands out is Jesus as the Lamb of God. This term is repeated elsewhere in John's Gospel, but has also become a fundamental term in the Eucharist, in Holy Communion, in what we call the Agnus Dei

Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world. *Have mercy on us*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. *Have mercy on us*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. *Grant us peace*

What is happening here is this: that the term "Lamb of God" is a clue to connecting Jesus with something, with an idea, with a value: the value of peace. In other words, conversion to the man

Jesus, somehow connects us to the mission of peace and makes us peaceable people. But we need to push further: what does peace and peaceable-ness according to the Gospel actually mean?

Maladjusted Creativity

Let's return to Martin Luther King for a minute! In a little paper he wrote, entitled "Transformed Non-conformists", King wrote this:

*"Everyone passionately seeks to be well adjusted. Of course, we must be if we are to avoid having neurotic personalities. But there are some things in our world to which people of goodwill must be maladjusted. I admit that I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation, and the crippling effects of discrimination, to the moral degeneracy of religious bigotry and the corroding effects of narrow sectarianism, nor to the economic conditions that deprive people of properly paid work and food." ...but I do (sadly become adjusted, I do accept these things). "Human salvation", he continues, "lies in the hands of the **creatively maladjusted**"*

I think this insight about *creative maladjustment* is crucial to our thinking as Christians in a world where apparent 'adjustment', causes so much damage. Returning to the idea of peace and being peaceable, this is precisely the challenge. In the real world, we never begin from a position of what the Roman world referred to as a "tabula rasa" or blank chalkboard. We are born into a violent world, we live in it, and we die in it. So easily and frequently, our desire for peace becomes corrupted, without our even noticing it: diminished, debased, to no more than a sort of counterviolence, a type of 'redemptive' violence. We say to ourselves, "if only we are violent enough, if only we can get rid of the cause of injustice and violence once and for all, then we will be able to stop the violence for good, we will be able to finally generate peace." But it never actually happens, because violence for good or evil, has a habit of becoming habitual. Violence sets a precedent for more violence, no matter what the motivation.

This was the thinking behind King's non-violent action, peace-able action that challenged both, abusive society and the usual violent protests against it. For King, Jesus the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", who takes away its abuse and its violence, invites a new behaviour, a new ethics, an ethics of *creative maladjustment*, which challenges our deeply-embedded conformity to violence in all its forms.

As we turn to a new decade, where climate change is killing us, the need to be *creatively maladjusted*, where our current 'well-adjusted' policy and practice has led to disaster, stands front and centre. And *how* we give expression to that need for creative maladjustment, as people rightly protest, remains fundamental to how we resolve the problems with which we are currently beset. Those fundamentals of peace and justice, justice and peace, as we journey with the lamb of God, remain as elusive and as crucial as ever.