

6th Sunday of Epiphany Year B 2021 Mark 1:40-45 **Scott MALCOLM**

"Hey Google, what's the weather forecast for west Auckland for tomorrow?" We are at our eldest son's home and a funny shaped dome like contraption answers, "There will be showers in the morning, clearing to fine weather in the afternoon. A high of 25 and a low of 15."

Google Assistant will set a timer for your baking, play you every song by the Rolling Stones in order of release or list all of the Prime Ministers of New Zealand by year of election. It will tell you the winners of the Melbourne Cup, how to spell alphabet and the location of a café doing breakfast nearest to you, all at the asking of a simple question. The only useful information it won't give you are the winning numbers for next Wednesdays Lotto Powerball.

Once upon a time knowledge and its access was held in the hands of a very few. The King and his advisors. The elders of the tribe. The medicine man. The chief. The Priest. This state of affairs lasted for many thousands of years.

Then in the last few centuries things began to change. First reading. Then the printing press. Then mass schooling and mass numbers of people learning to read. Then libraries and more schools. Then newspapers, radio, magazines, the movies and TV ... and then most recently, the internet.

Since the advent of the internet, whatever we may think of it, knowledge has been democratised, it has without doubt enabled more people to access more information, anywhere at any time, than at any time, in history.

Once upon a time you needed books, access to a library, depending on the information you were seeking perhaps a very substantial library, you needed to be in the same physical space as all of the information you wanted, now ... all you need is a cell phone and a reasonable internet connection. You could be at Cape Reinga or Stewart Island, it makes no difference.

The internet has made access to all kinds of knowledge available to everyone.

Interestingly enough in Mark, Jesus is seeking to do something very similar with the things of God.

In Mark chapter 1 Jesus preaches to all who will listen. "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is near, repent and believe in the good news." He exorcises a man with an unclean spirit, heals a woman with a fever, heals and exorcises all who come to him. These things take place in Galilee, home of the gentile population of Israel. In a synagogue in Capernaum, in the home of Simon and Andrew, in the towns and villages of Galilee. In these places where the gentile's dwell,, he reaches out, touches and heals a leper.

As we get to the end of Mark's first chapter, we get the impression that whatever Jesus is saying, whatever Jesus is doing ... it's not just for the few. It's for everyone ... no one is turned away. The message is preached everywhere, and to everyone who will listen. The exorcisms and healings are offered and performed on all who will turn up to receive. No one is excluded.

Not the afflicted, not women, not the sick or diseased. Not even the Leper. Considered sinners or unclean all, but if you were a Leper, especially so. Condemned as the worst of the worst, the scribes and priests would have nothing to do with you, the ordinary people would have nothing to do with you, your own families would have nothing to do with you, certainly, God wanted nothing to do with you

Or so you thought!

Then Jesus touches and heals you, and you begin to wonder, if suddenly, everything hasn't changed.

That touch speaks loudly that the unclean spirit crying out in the synagogue was right ... "What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy all this?"

All of who is holy and unholy, clean and unclean, all this judging in the hands of the few, all this God, in the hands of the few.

Well maybe he has.

Jesus healing and touch are a testimony against it all. Scribes, priests and religious establishment. Claims that you are sinful, unclean, dead to society. Testimony against culture and law which places you, and all around you in these positions.

The restoration you experience, is much more than a restoring of skin and bone, ligaments and tissue, ... in one magnificent chapter and action the whole world is restored. Cultural and religious establishments made whole. Long held power and belief structures cleansed. You, all lepers, all afflicted, all women, all the sick and diseased ... touched and healed. Liberated and set free.

Gone is the barrier arm which keeps you and your barred brothers and sisters away from the love, care and mercy of God.

Maybe he has come to say that no matter how bad we think we are, or what bad we think we have done, no matter what has happened to us, or what we have happened upon others, whatever our frailties, vulnerabilities, weaknesses ... our sins even. ...

no matter what people, even the prevailing culture says about us ... afflicted, women, lepers even, sinners or unclean all ... whatever and whomever....

Maybe he has come to say ...

That God ... come in him ... Jesus Christ ... loves us ... all.

"Hey Google" declares knowledge is for everyone.

A touch and "Be clean" declares that God is too.

Thanks be to God.