

DW: The only organism that doesn't change is dead. All organisms change. And the Church is the body of Christ - that's an organism, so that changes. Go for mercy rather than justice - that's a change.

[12] *Do you think the Church as it's organised itself today is what Jesus had in mind?*

RL: No, I certainly don't think the Church today is what Jesus had in mind. The Church is always going to be a human construct. I work with the Church of Scotland quite a lot and one of the things that they have done is, as a Church, deciding to prioritise the needs of, and the funding for, some of the poorest and the most needy parts of Scotland. So they identify their priority areas and they put resources into them: they put people into them, they put clergy into them, they put money into them. And they did this because they recognise that a priority for the poorest and the marginalised, which is often something we talk about in the Church, is a gospel imperative facing the entire Church - and not just the poorest areas. So it's a responsibility of the whole Church to reorganise itself in order to align itself with God's love for the poorest and the most marginalised. Things like that, where we take big decisions about where we're going to put our money and our people, say a lot about how we imagine God's Kingdom.

KW: The Church is absolutely *not* what Jesus had in mind, and I don't think anybody as a Jew in Palestine at that time could have possibly envisaged the Church as it is now - with thousands of denominations, all claiming to be the true faith [chuckles] and all saying all the other ones are wrong. I mean, it's

everything Jesus hated, I think really. The Church is a human institution. I know my Catholic colleagues say the Church is a divine institution. I'm an Anglican - my Church is *not* a divine institution, it's a human invention [chuckles]. But it mediates the gospel of God.

Nevertheless, David thinks that Jesus would recognise, and appreciate, some of the things going on in the Church today:

DW: Some things I think Christ would be very heartened by finding in his modern-day Church: food banks, Christian Aid collections, debt crisis relief and advice. I think when he came across those things in the modern Church he'd say: that's my girl!

[13] *How do you recognise God's timing in the midst of a complex life and world? Rachel and David:*

RL: I think we generally recognise God's timing looking back. So we recognise it in retrospect. And to be honest, at the time we often get it wrong - it's the things that make sense afterwards. And hopefully we will have been doing something that in retrospect does make sense, and we begin to see that thread of God through them.

DW: I'd probably say it's having the nerve to see him in the interruptions. And there are some stories in the Gospels where a 999 call - Jairus' twelve year-old daughter is dying and Jesus is called out to save her: 999 call. And as he's rushing there, he's interrupted by a woman who's been bleeding for twelve years, who touches his cloak - and is cured. And he has the conversation with her: your faith has made you well. And so he ministered in the interruption, in

the middle of a crisis. And sometimes we get so het up about: Right, this is my day today, this is my plan and; see God in the interruptions, in the white spaces between the words, rather than in the words themselves.

[14] *And now we call on Cathy Galvin for her Closing Reflection on 'The time is now'.*

Sometimes Jesus sought the quiet places to pray, to escape people clamouring for his attention, his healing, his wisdom. This wasn't because he wanted them to disappear. His Good News was for the poor: people we describe as 'other' - different to us, marginalised. 'Marginalised' is one of the most alienating words in the English language.

When I see a homeless person or beggar on the street, part of me wants them, and myself, to go away. I fear meeting someone on the ground at my feet - someone abject, passive: not stealing or confronting, simply asking for a little money or food at a time in history when food is plentiful and there's change in my purse.

In each rejection, I collaborate with power. Just as those who crucified Jesus were an alliance of priests and the ruling authorities, I become a Christian allying myself with forms of social behaviour linked with corporate, economic and political systems that fail to be fully human shaped. They convince us to spend, consume, become indebted and to look down on those who do not or can not. We may not be living as Jesus did, occupied by an imperial Roman power. But collusion is timeless. The time to change is now.

Why is it hard? Why do I not take the proper time to bend down and talk

to other human beings at my feet? In ignoring my conscience, my sin may be far more crippling than I understand. As a writer, I imagine my conscience is located somewhere in my head and heart, when perhaps it really exists in my hands, in what I can touch and give. Words, scripture even, fade in front of two hands hammered onto a cross by the seemingly good, the seemingly powerful, and by a single hand held out begging in the street.

Session 3 - God is present

[15]

In the first Chapter of Mark's Gospel we read that Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news that, among other things, the Kingdom of God has come near. In this session we look at how we can recognise that God is present. So, let's start by asking our contributors why it seems so hard to spot the presence of God in our bewildering world. David, Rachel and Keith:

DW: I think sometimes we're so full of ourselves we miss God - we miss God's quiet voice in the silence. The Christian gospel is about being saved by grace, but we act as if we're being saved by works. And it's just having the nerve to pause and not be always putting out, but let God put in.

RL: I think it's hard, because we often look in the wrong places. We often look in the holy, the churchy places, when perhaps God is at work in the surprising places in the world, which are harder for us to see. We often have very short horizons as well, and it's hard to lift our eyes above the things that are of our concern, and our very current concern, to see what God might be pointing to in other places.