

Ordinary 23 Year B 2021 Prov 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23 James 2:1-10 Mark 7:24-37 Scott MALCOLM

TV is a great pastime during L4 lockdown. That is, if you can find something you want to watch. After three weeks of being at home, working, cleaning and active relaxing, of trying to help the kids with their school work, keep marital and family relationships heading in the right direction, a little bit of down time in front of the telly is well earned.

But only if you haven't exhausted all of your options. Whether it be Netflix, Neon, TV 1, 2 or 3 on demand, as well as Disney+, Acorn, Amazon Prime, Sky and Apple. It can feel even worse if you have cut through the recommendations of family, friends, Facebook, Instagram and the NZ Herald!

Finding myself in this position during the weekend, I had a look through all that I had saved on my Sky box over the past several months, for such an occasion just as this. I was really surprised to see what was there.

Escape to the Country, Your Mortgage Free Home, Grand Designs, Grand Designs Australia, Grand Designs House of the Year Show, Phil and Kirstie's Love it or List it, and the foundation of them all, Location, Location, Location.

Like everyone else in the country and around the world, it appears I am obsessed by real estate.

And it's not just me, as our reading from Mark shows, so is he. Today, it's all about Location, Location, Location.

You might remember from last week that Jesus came speaking a different language from the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus spoke the language of openness, the Scribes and Pharisees of separation. Jesus wanted God to be available to all Israel, the Pharisees and Scribes, only to those who had performed their religious rites and duties. Only those who were ritually clean.

Jesus says that cleanness and uncleanness doesn't come from the rituals we perform, but from out of our own hearts.

And this morning he puts these words and thoughts in to action, by going on a journey. Some say a very long journey.

The reading says he goes from Galilee to Tyre which is north, and then to Sidon, which is north again, and then to the area of the 10 cities, or the Decapolis. Which is quite a long way South east.

The thing about these areas is that they are all places in Israel where Jewish religious practise is not strong. These 3 areas are not strongholds of Judaism, not even close. They are called the region of the Gentiles because of the large number of "others" who still live there. They are places strict religious Jews, those concerned about their ritual purity, wouldn't go, wouldn't even think about going, ... these places are unclean, as are the people who live there.

In real estate terms, this is Huntly rather than Herne Bay, Moerewa rather than Mt Eden. Not too many 3-4-million-dollar villas around here. But Jesus, true to his words last week, he is here.

The Scribes and Pharisees would be having a fit, remembering that they are from the real estate hot spot of Jerusalem, plenty of multimillion dollar mansions there! A great location to buy and invest.

So, what happens when he arrives? On top of all this religious uncleanness in the area where he is, the people he is mixing with, the very air that he is breathing.

Well, out of the woodwork comes a gentile, the uncleanliest of the unclean. Not only that, a woman, it just gets worse. Not only does she approach Jesus, a Jewish man, as if that wasn't bad enough, but he's also a Rabbi. This hole just gets deeper and deeper. She then speaks to him. This, under Jewish religious ritual is utterly unacceptable and Jesus should have turned on his heel and walked away.

But as we have seen, he doesn't do things like he should, so, rather, he stops and listens. She continues. A daughter, an unclean spirit ...

More uncleanness. How many more times can Mark make his point here that Jesus is putting his words about what is clean and unclean from last week into practise!

That it's not about hand washing, eating or drinking. It's not about separateness. It's not about living in the land of the unclean; Location, Location, Location.

It's about God's openness to people.

Firstly, to the children of Israel, and then to those who will eat the crumbs from the table. Praise the Lord, because that's us. If Jesus had not come speaking this different kind of language, you would have been considered a better person, if you lived in Remuera rather than Ranui, Epsom rather than Eketahuna, Orakei rather than Otangarei. Kandallah rather than Kaikohe.

Just like this woman and her daughter in Mark 7 from the land of the Gentiles.

But Jesus says no! God is open to everyone, everywhere.

And, as if in proof, in the midst of this place that is deemed unclean, these people who are deemed unclean, that according to the day, are even deemed those of unclean gender ... and have unclean spirits ...

Jesus finds more faith, than he ever had a hope of finding last week, when those rich real estate pickings from Jerusalem, came calling.

It seems remarkable, but in this sewage pond of uncleanness, faith is found at its strongest. This gentile woman, gets it.

Gets it all ...

And I think, on this long, lonely and very hard journey; this wonderful, persistent, and feisty woman, makes Jesus's day. And he made hers, because just like ritual washing of hands, Location, Location, Location makes no difference to whether we are acceptable to God or not.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

