

I was converted to the Christian Faith in 1980. Into a small rural Baptist Church up north. Marsden Baptist in One Tree Point. It is still one of the great joys of my life, the time we had with that little group of people in the early 1980's.

As you can imagine, it was a long list of firsts in church life. First church service, first communion, first time hearing a sermon and singing in the congregation. First time preaching. And then after a little bit, the first church meeting.

In the Baptist church they have an AGM like we do, but also every ¼ they have a 1/4ly meeting. This is because they are a congregationally governed group and it's a way of keeping the congregational members informed and empowered. It is at these meetings once a ¼ where the business of the congregation gets done.

I will never forget my first 1/4ly meeting at Marsden Baptist. It was very well attended, as church membership is taken very seriously. The church building was filled with people I had come to know and on the whole love very deeply. These people had become my family.

Like all church meetings, it opened with prayer and then the Apologies and Attendance, Minutes of the Previous Meeting and so on. It all seemed to be going very well until we got to the section at the end of the night called General Business.

A long-time member of the Deacons Court, just like our Anglican Vestry was bringing forward a motion, approved by the Deacons about doing up the kitchen and purchasing some new equipment, utensils and the like. After the motion was put and things opened up for discussion, the fun began.

It didn't take long at all for the discussion to get down to what sort of utensils and equipment was going to be purchased. It started with the colour of the cups that should be got for the new kitchen ... and that's where it stayed. The meeting argued for nearly 45 minutes about what colour those cups should be. Back and forth, back and forth.

Now of course, the discussion wasn't about the colour of the cups at all, but about which of the two Deacons wives on either side of the argument, was going to win that particular battle. The meeting closed up before the matter was resolved.

I couldn't believe it. And even as a very new Christian I could see that this wasn't about cups, it was about power, and who was going to be the greatest. And it was concentrated around the most minor matters imaginable. It was an embarrassing example of majoring in the minors.

Three months later at the next meeting the minutes of the previous 1/4ly meeting were read back, and what was most apparent was the palpable sense of collective embarrassment, that we had all been a party to such a thing. Arguing for 45 minutes over the colour of the cups in the Marsden Baptist Church kitchen.

As we have seen Jesus isn't interested in majoring in minors. The only thing he wants is major majors. This is what he has been seeking to tell the disciples for all of this section of Mark that we have been reading. Not worrying about the tradition of the elders, that not performing religious rites doesn't make us unclean, and that geography plays no part in faith.

Rather that God loves everyone, it is what comes out of our hearts that makes us unclean and that in the midst of the most unlikely places, real faith is to be found.

Jesus also tells us that he is the Messiah, but not the kind of Messiah than they were expecting. That going to the cross is a given, and he will not be swayed. That he comes to bring Exodus. An Exodus from the slavery and bondage that bedevils us and our world.

And now the call to a discipleship that can only be majoring in the majors.

“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out.”

There is very little chance of these things being confused with the colour of the cups at Marsden Baptist. This is major league discipleship. This is the call Jesus places on the 12, on his disciples as they follow him through Galilee and on to Jerusalem. This is the call that comes down through Mark to us.

The idea here is that disciples whose lives are consumed by wanting to be the greatest, the most powerful, have lost their flavour. That disciples who have lost their openness to other Christians, have lost their saltiness. Disciples are instead, called to “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

The promise Jesus makes of Exodus is worthy of this call ...

In fact, he says, this call is worthy of giving everything for: hands, feet, eyes ... life ...

even having the power to choose the colour of the cups in the Marsden Baptist Church kitchen ...

This is the call that is made here.

Nothing, is worth losing the opportunity to be free in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

That is Jesus' claim ... and promise.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.