

Certainty. Business leaders say they need it. Auckland Chamber of Commerce CEO Michael Barnett, and Chris Bishop Opposition spokesperson for the Covid 19 response have both called for it, numerous times over the past few weeks. Certainty.

Certainty. There are calls for plans, pathways, roadmaps, routes out of the current situation we are all in, a way out of Covid. Everyone wants to move from L3 to L1. Everyone is looking for certainty.

And it's true. All of us live, work and function better under the normal understanding of what things are going to be like. All of us cry out for normalcy. Everyone ... wants certainty.

The trouble is ... at the moment. There isn't any. While the world is a lot of things ...

Certain is not one of them.

For many of us, this may be the first time we have faced this situation. The first time we have not been able to plan. The first time we have not known what is going to happen next week. The first time we have not had the world respond to us as it always has. And that's hard ... but we are not alone. It has happened before.

There have been other times when certainty was not very common in the world.

A small collective of Christian groups in Rome, just after the deaths of the great Apostle Paul, and the rock on which the church was built, The Apostle Peter, was such a time.

Everything had been shaken. Everything had been rattled. There was nothing certain. Nothing at all. Even faith seemed unfounded. Heroes of, and in the church were dead, the links to the past were cut off and the future looked very dark. Certainty.

The trouble is ... at that moment. There wasn't any. While the world was a lot of things ...

For the Christians in Rome ... Certain was not one of them.

Into this world Mark sends his gospel.

And in this gospel, at least the part that we have been looking at over the past seven weeks or so, this is what he said.

That Jesus speaks a different language from the Scribes and Pharisees.

That geography, ethnicity, economic status, and gender play no part in our standing with God.

That Jesus comes promising us an Exodus from the slavery and bondage that bedevils us.

That this Exodus, is worth more than anything in the physical world that we can experience. That nothing, is worth losing the opportunity to be free in the everlasting kingdom of God.

And this includes our reading for today, that all the riches in the world are not enough to compensate for losing that opportunity.

Let's remember what's happening here. Mark's community are facing hardship, the most incredible hardship imaginable. Some of their members have died. Not only died, been murdered, martyred for their faith. Who knows who or what is going to be next? These Christian people are uncertain. They are worried, frightened, some may even have had a gutful. And so, what does Mark say to them. To run and hide? To give up and fade away? To come out and protest?

No, he reminds them of the one they follow and the hope that drove him forward ... to the cross. He reminds them of the promise he made them. And how much better that promise is ... than anything that they might lose here, in obtaining and hanging on to it. Hands, feet, eyes, riches, family ... that nothing is worth losing the opportunity of being free in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

And at the very end of the story, on Easter Sunday ... he reminds them that no matter what they face ... that even death will not stop what he has promised them. And that even in this life ... no matter what they give up ... that they will never be alone ...

If we feel pushed to the limit by Covid. If we feel under pressure because of L3 lockdowns. If the state of the world is making us worried. If there are things in our lives or the lives of our families which seem too much to bear ... if we need certainty. Let's hear the gospel of Mark. Written to Christian people hundreds and hundreds of years ago, in just as uncertain times as ours.

Telling us, that Jesus has been this way before. That he knows these things are difficult and even impossible. But that with God ...

That he will help us to endure ... that we are called to endure ...

... and that we will never be alone.

... And that, what is promised ... makes all this worthwhile.

This is Mark's "gospel." And it is certain.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.