**#32 Sunday 3 October 2021 SG 9am & 10.30 Services**

**Trinity 18 Year B Proper 22**

Hebrews 1: 1-4; 2: 5-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, **2**but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:1-4&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29949a)] whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. **3**He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:1-4&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29950b)] all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4**having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs…

**5**Now God[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29966a)] did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. **6**But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29967b)]  
    or mortals, that you care for them?[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29967c)]  
**7**You have made them for a little while lower[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29968d)] than the angels;  
    you have crowned them with glory and honor,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29968e)]  
**8**    subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29969f)] left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, **9**but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29970g)] than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29970h)] he might taste death for everyone.

**10**It was fitting that God,[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29971i)] for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. **11**For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father.[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29972j)] For this reason Jesus[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29972k)] is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,[[l](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29972l)] **12**saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,[[m](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews++2%3A+5-12+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29973m)]  
    in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

Mark 10: 2-16

**2**Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” **3**He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” **4**They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” **5**But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. **6**But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ **7**‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A+2-16&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24590a)] **8**and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. **9**Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

**10**Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. **11**He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; **12**and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

**13**People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. **14**But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. **15**Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” **16**And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

I wonder if the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews had read or heard Mark’s Gospel? And if Mark had read or heard Hebrews? Mark was probably written sometime between 55 and 65; Hebrews, according to some scholars, possibly a couple of years afterwards, certainly before the Temple was destroyed in 70. I’ve seen the year 68 offered in speculation. The thoughts are roughly contemporary – but how do they hang together a portrait of the society that Jesus Christ lived and taught within? How do they inform the society he lives and teaches within now?

Paul is stating a broad faith. I love the scene-setting of Paul’s opening lines; ‘Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, **2**but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201:1-4&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29949a)] whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.’ This is certainty of the order of the world, of how things work, of Paul’s and his listeners’ heritage and discipleship, and of course of the nature of Jesus Christ – who he was, what he did and why.

It’s a concise round up of where we are now; where we are now is that we’re on the edge of, or possibly right in the middle of, *a new covenant*. The covenant that God made with the *Jewish* people was ‘long ago,’ as Paul says right at the start, it has changed in these ‘last days.’ He seems also to be taking for granted that new days are coming; they might already be here; Paul’s people are perhaps actually now living in the ‘first days.’

And perhaps Mark is showing some of the tensions inherent in trying to live out Paul’s broad faith, those first days?

Paul draws on a shared heritage; it is *our* ancestors to whom God spoke, and the Hebrews that received this letter will have understood themselves as rooted in that lineage. Alongside this Paul is drawing, reasonably vaguely, on theological tradition – saying ‘someone testified, somewhere’…(he means the author of Psalm 8, 5-8; Paul didn’t have the benefit of footnotes)…in his statement of the big, overarching themes of faith.

Mark, in contrast, gets involved in difficult and troubling domestic nitty-gritty. What is happening on the ground in Mark seems here to be far, far removed from Paul’s affirmative certainties; Jesus seems to assume that people **won’t** agree with him. Perhaps life on the ground isn’t so predictable that it can be organised in quite the way Paul suggests. Of course we agree with Paul’s statement of faith, but the practical application of the consequences of that faith, that Mark shows Jesus is dealing with, is far more difficult that he suggests. A broad faith is one thing – our *consequent beliefs*, principles we derive from faith that we live by, are quite another. I think it’s vital that we acknowledge and discuss those *consequent beliefs* as much as we discuss our scripture.

For instance, our instinct says that Mark’s scene seems far more sinister than Paul’s worldview; Jesus seems tested by the Pharisees – ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife’? they ask.

It might be that they are making a genuine inquiry, a genuine search for clarity and knowledge, like Nicodemus does in John 3 – but the trajectory of the Gospels is of course a search for Jesus’s destruction, so when we read in this knowledge, the consequences are that we are on the lookout for a trap. But Tom Wright says somewhere that ‘…the Pharisees looked for a great renewal in which the present state of things would be radically altered.’ Some think Jesus himself was a Pharisee. So are we right to sense a trap here? Are Pharisees good or bad? Has our faith has led to a consequent belief that Jesus and Pharisees - or Jesus and any Jewish authority - are in conflict? Does our consequent belief overshadow our faith?

Like Paul, Mark’s Jesus refers to the heritage, but, in perhaps a sign of the new covenant that Paul speaks openly about, Jesus dismisses Moses’s warrant for the Pharisees’ answer, saying that the law was only written because of the hardness of heart of humanity. God had ordained marriage differently – in the words we say still, in the marriage service; ‘what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ What do we do with this? As often is the case, Jesus’ message is a tough one, and, in common with some other of his teachings, is one that humanity has found impossible. My parents divorced when I was 14, and it was a relief for the whole family. But faith and consequent beliefs clash again.

As I read these wonderful passages, I found myself getting deeper into, and then lifting out of, a theological mess. When I started to think about these two passages individually, they seemed to be relatively straightforward; the more I thought about them, the less straightforward they became, particularly in conversation with each other.

What I think we have demonstrated here, in the contrast between Paul’s certainty and Jesus’s debate, is the clash between faith and consequent belief. Paul is stating the precepts of faith; Jesus is dealing with the effect of faith on the ground, he’s dealing with the beliefs and actions that come from faith – the practical consequences of faith.

We still see this clash now – it’s not so long ago that, drawing from a broad statement of a genuine faith, the consequent belief in the Church was that women couldn’t be ordained. And again, we are finally having a debate about consequent belief in the ‘Living in Love and Faith’ report into the Church’s position on human sexuality. The clash of emphases, between faith and consequent belief, that Paul and Mark are suggesting, is still with us. We must be on the lookout for where our consequent beliefs, shown by our words and actions in the world, negates faith – perhaps misrepresents faith.

Some consequent beliefs – like the refusal to ordain women – negate the society that Jesus represents, the society that asks people to ‘come as you are’. For me, it’s a plural, living society, a prophetic society where we are always trying to see how things might be different. So may we too be prophetic, inclusive, generous, kind, and holy, and may we try to become and remain aware of where our consequent beliefs are opposed to the faith that Paul speaks of. May we continue a dialogue between these two polarities of our faith as we move in Christ’s world. Amen