

Matthew 21: 1-11

There was once a man who was very ill. He had gone to many doctors, undergone numerous tests, and was prescribed lots of medicine. But he was still very sick. He tried everything from home remedies to herbal tea to mega-doses of certain vitamins along with his prescriptions. He still didn't feel any better than before. Then he heard of a doctor who could cure diseases and illnesses that others couldn't. So he called and made an appointment, all the time thinking, "Finally, I'll feel well again." The doctor gave him a thorough exam and, after examining the test results, told the man that all he had to do to become healthy was lose about 25 kilo's, exercise regularly, and eat more vegetables, fruits, and grains. The doctor also told him he didn't need that medicine he was on. The man was furious when he heard this. He demanded that the doctor prescribe some new medicine for him, possibly some experimental drug not yet on the market, which would cure his illness. The doctor patiently repeated his advice. "You don't need medicine," she said. "You need to change your lifestyle, you need to change who you are." Well, the man abused the doctor and left. For the rest of his life, he told everyone who would listen that the doctor was a quack who shouldn't be allowed to practice medicine.

Once upon a time there was a woman who had run up a lot of debts, so she embezzled money from her employer. Of course, the company found out and pressed charges. Most of the money had been spent on alcohol and she had been arrested many times for driving while intoxicated. Her most recent arrest was a result of causing an accident that had killed the other driver. She didn't know what to do, until a friend told her of an outstanding defence lawyer who seldom lost a case.

So she called him and he agreed to see her. She thought, "Whew. He'll get me off the hook and everything will be fine." When they met, the lawyer studied her case and said, "What you did was wrong, and you may have to spend some time in prison. After you are released, you will need to get into an ongoing program of recovery from alcohol abuse. You will also need to get a steady job and repay the company the money you stole. If you will do this, you may be able to get your life back together again, and if you admit to what you have done you may get a more lenient sentence, basically you need to change your life style, you need to change who you are." The woman was furious. She yelled at the lawyer, "I don't need you to give me a lecture, I need you to get these charges dropped. Whether I drink or not is my business, not yours!" She stomped out and began a letter-writing campaign to have him disbarred. Once upon a time there was a small nation that was deeply troubled.

For centuries the people of Judea had been held down by foreign armies. Many of the citizens had become cynical about life, and as a result they cheated friends and neighbours in the marketplace. There was no peace, no prosperity. But then there appeared a tiny ray of hope in the midst of the darkness. There was talk of a messiah who would fix everything for them--a messiah who would overthrow the foreign army, establish a strong, independent government, and bring peace and prosperity to the nation. Word came of a man from Nazareth, who was able to heal people, cast out demons, and even change water into wine. People came from all over to hear him speak. And he could hold his own when the scribes and Pharisees confronted him.

The people felt that finally the messiah who would lead an army against Rome and re-establish Israel as a strong and prosperous nation was coming. One day this man rode a donkey into the capital city of Jerusalem. The people poured into the streets and cheered his arrival. They waved palm branches, spread garments on the road, and shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the

name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! But he did not set up a new government, instead he said, People, you need to love one another instead of yourselves, you need to change your lifestyle, you need to change who you are.” You’re joking, the peoples said, us change we want you to change the system not us and so a campaign was begun to have the man crucified.

We often have expected outcomes in life. These outcomes are born out of our family story, how past generations responded, from our own life experiences and our personal desires, what we want. It all gives us a template of how we respond and what we therefore expect to happen in any given situation. This may then be supported by our own close circle of people, be they community, club, family or friends that agree with us, and so we can get the understanding that our way forward is the only right way.

Our sick man’s expectation was that drugs would cure him. The alcoholic believed that getting off the charge was going to solve her problems and the people of Judea believed that a Messiah would come to save them by taking on the power base of Rome, overthrowing the present regime and installing a new ruling authority that would better suit their own needs. They all had pre conceived outcomes and so were locked into a particular way of being.

God often places new opportunities or solutions in front of us but because of our expectations we do not always see them. For us to be awoken to these, two things need to happen.

Firstly we need a catalyst, something that will make us aware of other possibilities. We may hear or read about another person’s life story or understanding that may be different to ours or we may experience an event in our own life that opens our minds to other understandings or possible outcomes. In our first two stories a doctor and a lawyer were the catalysts (pretty bluntly really) and of course in our gospel reading it was Jesus. Tricky thing is we may listen but don’t always want to hear or in many cases we think our option is the one that everyone else needs to hear!

The second thing we need to do regardless of what we may think or believe is to listen attentively to other possibilities and be open and willing to give them a go and change our expectations or direction. And this is the tricky part and the reason why the best outcome in all of our three stories did not come to fruition, no one was prepared to see another way out of their predicament and make change themselves. Their pre conceived outcomes blocked them from realising their full potential.

Christ continually seeks change from us all. Change that will bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, for it is us that will bring this about when we learn to live together appreciating and accepting the differences we all have and yes maybe even accepting an alternative way of being and doing, or a different solution to the challenge in front of us, one completely unlike what we may have originally believed was right.