

Trinity 4 HM

Once global warming has made London a tropical resort on the banks of the Thames you may become familiar with a once-common Australian experience, the exploding drink.

Let me explain. When, as in 2018, a proper heat wave strikes and a great thirst comes upon you, then good old-fashioned warm ale or barely chilled lemonade become unsatisfying. Domestic refrigerators expand to meet this need and freezer compartments also expand. And you will find yourself, coming home after a hot day, putting a tin or bottle of some enticing beverage in the freezer to cool quickly. You will sit, perhaps, and watch the news, lulled into relaxation by a more typically English cooling breeze. You will retire to bed, forgetful of a small but potent story unfolding in your freezer. There, as you sleep, the beer, Pepsi or even champagne will break out of its bottle or tin and provide you with a small arctic scene to defrost the next time you open the freezer. There may be a very small pop or bang when the bottle or tin opens, but you won't hear it.

I like to think about today's gospel as a story bursting quietly but unstoppably out like that. Biblical scholars call this a Markan sandwich, but I think exploding drinks are more fun. And a better image for the gospel of the Kingdom.

Today we have two examples of the power of God in Jesus, one contained in the other, bursting out despite Jesus' apparent determination to keep the secret in the bottle - *He strictly ordered them that no one should know this.* Mark 5.43

Mark does this about half a dozen times in his short gospel, enclosing one story between two parts of the other. The two stories are always related to one another in such a way that one story throws light on the meaning of the other. Today this is also offered as a stylistic variation after Mark accumulates four stories of mighty acts, following on the parables section in chapter 4. Last week we had the Calming of the Storm, in which Jesus is shown to possess the divine ability to overcome, for us, the chaos and fear which the waters of the deep represent in scripture. We have skipped past the story of the Gerasene demoniac, in which the unclean pigs are first the recipients of the evil spirit of madness and then in turn, lemming-like, dispatch themselves in a *kamikaze* stampede into that same element of chaos, the waters of the lake.

Those stories are about men. Today they are matched by two female subjects, rendered unclean by illness and death, one suffering a debilitating illness for 12 years, the exact lifetime of the other, a girl who is first mortally ill and then dies.

Jesus should have physical contact with *neither* of them, according to the law. The woman touches him and he feels power haemorrhaging from *him* as she is healed of her issue of blood. He carefully ascribes the healing to the woman's faith, and the short delay of this encounter seems to have brought the other small story to an end, with the death of the girl.

But Jesus won't have that. Taking with him his inner circle, Peter, James and John,

those who will see him transfigured on the Holy Mountain in a few chapters' time, he dismisses those who scoff, takes the hand of the dead child, and bids her get up with the Aramaic words '*talitha cum*' (a rare verbatim quotation from Jesus in his own language).

And then the life in her fizzes up and explodes again: she jumps up and walks about, at which Jesus suggests she should have something to eat (presumably a Markan sandwich). Then, finally, we have that weird coda,

He strictly ordered them that no one should know this Mark 5.43

After this Jesus enacts that aspiration to remain unrecognized, hidden: he makes a disappointing visit home, where familiarity has bred indifference and he is unable to do any powerful deeds, 'without honour' in his home town.

Then he sends the twelve out on a teaching mission, but that is next week. You might want to reread chapters 4 to 6 sooner than that, because these chapters are at the heart of the Good News as Mark tells it. Most of chapter 4 is devoted to parables and what they are intended to achieve. Mark believes there is a deliberate intention to be less than clear in these teaching stories, thus explaining why Jesus remains unrecognized as the Messiah. Now, he says, the powerful deeds are also, somehow, *hidden* examples of God in Jesus.

I like to compare these stories to exploding drinks because one way of looking at this strange theme in Mark, sometimes called the Messianic Secret, is that it is sure to burst out under the pressure of being kept in the bottle. It's an image I like for the same reason that I approve of champagne: it suggests the irrepressible power of God's love and his ultimate kingship, the Good News that we are safe in God's universe, 'saved' as some put it. It reminds us that these teachings and actions of Jesus are all a cause of great joy and celebration. Our allegiance to the kingdom should be like that: there are few things less likely to convert the world than miserable Christians.

I'm not advocating the irritating idiot grin that sometimes passes for Christianity. I mean the deep peace and joy that our life's journey with God can produce.

I once heard Rowan Williams preach at St Alban's Holborn, where he described this as that sense you have with some holy people that they always bring someone else into the room with them.

That quality will have been instantly noticeable in the lives touched by today's stories; and we need it to be bursting out of *us*, like frozen champagne on a hot day.