

Epiphany 3
21/1/2018

Mark the Evangelist

1 Corinthians 7:29-32a
Psalm 62
Mark 1:14-20

God's new soundtrack for our lives

It is very strange to watch a movie with the soundtrack turned off. You see the action and hear the dialogue but the clues as to how to *interpret* it all are missing. For the soundtrack serves to tell us how to “feel” about what we are seeing.¹ It colours our experience of the drama.

From Paul we have heard this morning not, of course, about soundtracks but about the way in which Christians live most faithfully.

...let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

Live “as if not,” Paul counsels, although this is not a stoic counsel. He proposes here not a detachment from the world’s challenges and disappointments but rather an awareness of what time it is:

...the appointed time has grown short... the present form of this world is passing away.

What has happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus causes a re-reading of the time in which we live, and so a re-reading of the *end* or goal towards which we are living. To live “as if not” is to change the *meaning* of what we see and do. It is to change the soundtrack behind the action of our lives.

The action itself doesn’t much change, at least to begin with. Our relationships continue, our sorrows and our joys, our buying and selling and the other dealings which make up our lives. But a changed sense of the times, and so a changed sense of our end, changes also how we experience what happens around us.

And so Paul does *not* say *Do not mourn* but mourn “as if not”: for there is a joy in Christian conviction which colours all passing sadness. He does *not* say *Do not rejoice* but rejoice “as if not”: there is a realism in Christian conviction which recognises that the Kingdom is not yet fully come. He does not say *Do not deal in worldly things* but deal “as if not”: as if they were not merely worldly things but realities within which God might dwell, with blessing.

For the times, and the world in time, are different if *Jesus* is Lord: they are not closed in on what we can only *see*. This is why we can tell the story of a crucified man “as if not” an abject failure but the very triumph of God. It is why we can eat and drink “as if not” bread and wine but the very substance of God’s life with and for us. We can see in what

¹ For a demonstration of how easily a story can be manipulated with a bit of careful cutting and a different soundtrack, it’s worth looking at some of the spoof movie trailers on the internet, casting such as [Mary Poppins](#) or [Frozen](#) as horror movies, or [The Silence of the Lambs](#) as a romantic comedy.

we have not possessions but common wealth. We can see in another's need not merely their misfortune or fault but our responsibility.

Christian discipleship is life to a particular soundtrack, a particular set of interpretations. It is an experience of life as charged with God, coloured by God, resonating with more than the old sound track will allow us to hear.

And, in the end, the change of sound track will be involve more than simply a different beat, a different mood. The action itself will begin to change because of the different experiences. Different relationships will develop, different experiences will cause mourning or joy, different things will be bought and sold, because values shift when the times change and the end is something different. To live "as if not" is to begin to change the world. *Live like this*, Paul says.

When the psalmist declares *You, Yahweh, are my God*, and Jesus calls *Follow me*, we hear precisely what we've heard from Paul: live as if the world where not what you have imagined so far but according to God's own imagination.

And the world will move.

And you will begin truly to live.

By the grace of God, may this world and life be ever more fully ours, to God's greater glory and our richer humanity. Amen
