

A Ship Called Dignity

*There's a man I meet, walks up our street
He's a worker for the council, has been twenty years
And he takes no lip off nobody and litter off the gutter
Puts it in a bag and never thinks to mutter*

*And he packs his lunch in a Sunblest bag, the children call him Bogie
He never lets on but I know 'cause he once told me
He let me know a secret about the money in his kitty
He's gonna buy a dinghy, gonna call her dignity*

*And I'll sail her up the west coast, through villages and towns
I'll be on my holidays, they'll be doing their rounds
They'll ask me how I got her, I'll say, "I saved my money"
They'll say, "Isn't she pretty, that ship called dignity?"*

*And I'm telling this story in a faraway scene
Sipping down raki and reading Maynard Keynes
And I'm thinking about home and all that means
And a place in the winter for dignity*

*And I'll sail her up the west coast, through villages and towns
I'll be on my holidays, they'll be doing their rounds
They'll ask me how I got her, I'll say, "I saved my money"
They'll say, "Isn't she pretty, that ship called dignity?"*

*I'll set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up
Yeah, set it up again, set it up again, set it up again, set it up again
Set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up, set it up
Yeah, set it up again, set it up again, set it up again, set it up again*

*And I'm thinking about home and I'm thinking about faith
And I'm thinking about work and I'm thinking, how good it would be
To be here some day on a ship called dignity
A ship called dignity, that ship*

This Scottish song by Deacon Blue from the 80's needs no introduction.

Ricky Ross, Lorraine McIntosh, keyboard player James Prime, and drummer Dougie Vipond sing about one of the greatest themes of humanity, dignity.

A song about someone who had a dream, a dream of a better life, a dream that one day he would sail in his little boat up the West Coast of Scotland, he would sail away from picking up other people's rubbish; he would become the captain of his own little boat.

This is dignity.

English Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, theologian, and author, Jonathan Sacks, in his award winning book, *The Dignity of Difference*, writes "The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognise God's image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals are different from mine? If I cannot then I have made God in my image, instead of allowing him to remake me in his. Can Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Confucians, Catholics and Protestants, make space for one another in the middle east, India, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Kosovo, and the dozens of other places in which different ethnic and religious groups exist in close proximity?"

Can we create a paradigm shift through which we come to recognise that we are enlarged, not diminished by difference, just as we are enlarged, not diminished by the 6000 languages that exist today, each with its unique sensibilities, art forms and literary expressions?"

The dignity of difference!

Challenging words indeed from the Chief Rabbi...But words that need to be heard in this often-fragile world, where war is never far from the door of human beings.

Today in our Churches in the UK, we celebrate Racial Justice Sunday. A day when we can stop and reflect upon how inclusive or exclusive are our churches.

A day when we remember individuals and groups that are seen to be different. A day when we remember the importance of dignity and that we all should have a dream of a better place, we all should have our own ship called dignity, in whatever context that might take.

The Church of Scotland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group established by our General Assembly in recent years, has recently begun work aimed at empowering people across the church to celebrate the diversity of all God's people and to strengthen our culture of welcome.

Acting Convener Rev Mandy Ralph wrote "As Christians, we believe that all humans were created in God's image," "This is what gives us dignity. Every single person on this planet mirrors God. To treat every person with respect, fairness and dignity is the appropriate answer to God's creation of humankind in God's image."

Today's reading informs us that Jesus chose a dubious collection of individuals as the ones to bring his Kingdom in. I doubt if we would have chosen those 12 disciples. But Jesus chose them and gave them dignity.

A small group with many differences, a small group that wanted positions of power and a small group who would all die as martyrs for following Christ.

As far as we know there was not a wealthy or a famous or an influential person amongst them. They had no special education, they belonged to the common ordinary people and they were such a strange mixture of all backgrounds from Zealots to tax collectors to fishermen and Jesus formed a team from this group of men and gave them dignity.

A curious group of people following a man who would be crucified on a cross! That is how our faith begins!

It's into this small group that Jesus speaks his words of encouragement and gives them dignity.

He says to them, If you are poor, hungry, marginalised and excluded from power, then God's promised blessings are already yours. You can walk taller, you can hold your heads higher and you can wait confidently for the positive changes which the Kingdom will bring.

We don't know a lot about some of the team members, the Gospels focus only on a few prominent people, but I believe each one would have had a back story. Each one would be able to tell you how Jesus came into their lives, and how he transformed their lives, and how he gave them dignity.

Just look at the lives Jesus touched and changed, hated tax collectors like Zachaeus, women who were thought to be sinful, lepers whom nobody would touch...

He invested three years of his life into this mixed group of men, coming from different backgrounds but all with a common desire, to give up everything and follow Jesus.

He gives a vision of a new Kingdom and they are part of it.

What will it look like?

It's going to be tough, on the way they will meet with poverty, hunger and persecution, but he gives them a dream, that they will be satisfied, laugh, rejoice, leap, rewarded, their fortunes will be reversed, for the hardship is temporary, a better future is coming.

They will sail their ship called dignity, and they will be satisfied, they will laugh and rejoice.

Yes, he gives them a vision of a better world.

That's what Jesus is about, working towards a better world.

It's great to see our Cadder Kids coming back to church, for they give us all hope.

Today, their leader Laura, is focussing on the same theme as us. We have started a WhatsApp chat with the leaders, and it will be a good way for me to stay connected with them. I will tell them what my theme is going to be.

Their leader Laura wrote, "Today, we are going to focus on a fairer world and how they can include others, which will tie in nicely with us starting collection again, and collecting for hungry children."

Great work Laura, teaching the children the importance of dignity.

Transform is one of the marks of mission. That's what Jesus came to do, he came to transform lives; communities and the world. To transform them from unjust structures and to give people dignity.

Racial Justice Sunday is about seeing God's image in every human being, the colour of skin, the language, the culture is an external, it's what lies beneath the surface that's important. That's what was important to Jesus, how we treat people, how much dignity do we give to others, that's what we will be judged on.

The Greatest Showman tells the story of the beginning entertainment shows that morphed into the famous Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Barnum celebrates the chorus line of freaks in his circus and eventually comes to realise that he had created a safe place for them which they view as home. As these performers dance and sing, we are reminded of the words of James Conlon in his book *Lyrics for Re-Creation*:

"At the heart of creativity is diversity. Diversity is at the core of the universe and is its art form. We need to embrace and appreciate the differences in places and people."

Our world is continually challenged at celebrating diversity. But diversity can be challenging when people are different from us.

God has created a world that abounds with variety. Everywhere we look, we see signs of diversity which can serve as a spur to our wonder. To be truly alive in this fascinating world is to open our hearts to the "others" who are very different from us. The famous entertainer P.T. Barnum (Hugh Jackman) called these folk "curiosities."

The take-away spiritual message of this film: Blessed are the Inclusive.

The key song is

This is me...

I am not a stranger to the dark

Hide away, they say

'Cause we don't want your broken parts

I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars

Run away, they say

No one'll love you as you are

But I won't let them break me down to dust

I know that there's a place for us

For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down

I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out

I am brave, I am bruised

I am who I'm meant to be, this is me

Look out 'cause here I come

And I'm marching on to the beat I drum

I'm not scared to be seen

I make no apologies, this is me

Another round of bullets hits my skin

Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in

We are bursting through the barricades and

Reaching for the sun (we are warriors)

Yeah, that's what we've become (yeah, that's what we've become)

I won't let them break me down to dust

I know that there's a place for us

For we are glorious

What about us this morning?

Have we found dignity through Jesus Christ?

Do we know his restoration, his healing, his forgiveness in our lives?

Have we a ship called dignity?

Martin Luther King, one of our great inspirational Christians - he had a ship called dignity and he saw it in a vision of his little children. He said, "I have a dream that one day little black boys and girls will be holding hands with little white boys and girls."

In one sentence, that was his ship called dignity.

A little girl received a lesson in her Sunday school about the disciples. When she got home, her mum asked, what did you learn today? Excitedly she did not get the words out quite right and she said mum we've been learning about Jesus' samples!

Never a truer word, for that's what the disciples were called to be samples of Jesus. Samples that people could see and say they have been with Jesus!

Samples that lived their lives with the dignity that Jesus gave them.

We as Christ's followers are also sent out to make space for difference, to recognise God's image in someone who is not in our image, whose language, faith, ideals are different from ours?

Rabbi Sacks is right, this is a test of our faith. Rickie Ross is right, dignity is a ship and the curiosities in the greatest showman are right, This is me!

I am brave, I am bruised

I am who I'm meant to be, this is me.

But most of all Jesus is right,

Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Our poverty is our need for God. If we know this need then we are indeed blessed.

Amen