

Unsettling!

- Communion & Hong's baptism during this service too!

Introduction

- Have you ever known someone who particularly made you feel uncomfortable when you were in their presence?
 - someone who made you feel **unsettled**?
 - who made you self-conscious, questioning your own actions, maybe tempted you to justify what you were doing...
- That may, or may not, be a good thing!
- **Let me give you an example:**
 - **computing student**; project work in final year; periodically each student and their supervisor got together with 3 other students+supervisors; presentation skills, and the insight of the outsider...
 - one of the **other supervisors** who was present was, for me, a **profoundly unsettling person!**
 - **Prof Sidney Michaelson**; short and round and with a huge beard! Often closed his eyes and looked asleep.... then would come a question!
 - **his questions would cut right through whatever flannel or weak thinking** you were engaged in at the time! Your lack of work or background reading would be exposed! Your over-optimistic schedule would be ridiculed....
- **Prof Sidney Michaelson was a very unsettling person!**
- **Maybe there are people you know who see right through you?**
 - who ask you those uncomfortable but sometimes helpful questions?
 - or who you just can't get a handle on for some reason...
- **Jesus himself was a profoundly unsettling person, and never less during the last week of his earthly life in Jerusalem...**

By what authority? (vs 11:27-33)

- Let me set a bit of the background for the events we read this morning:
 - we've skipped over from Jesus on the road to Jesus (**eg, Jesus' teaching about the children in Mark 10**) and we are now in Jerusalem...
 - we've missed out the Triumphal Entry, we've missed out the clearing of the Temple, though we'll come back to some of these incidents immediately before Easter
 - so these incidents occur in Jerusalem, in the run-up to Passover time, when religious and national fervour was running high
 - just after the Triumphal Entry... **and so the question would be going round, "has Jesus put down a marker? Is he staking his claim...?"**
 - just after the Temple Cleared... **and so again the question would be going round, "has Jesus put down a marker? Is he challenging the priests and teachers of the law and the elders?"**
- For their part, **the authorities are jumpy:**
 - generally, never mind the presence of Jesus, this was a dangerous time - they were answerable to the Romans for the peaceable running of Palestine, but this was the only time in the year when the Romans stationed a permanent garrison in Jerusalem...
 - if you were a religious or nationalist nutter attempting to pull off a stunt, you'd do it in Jerusalem at Passover...
- And so these jumpy members of the ruling authorities come to Jesus:
 - they come to challenge Jesus... **(11:28) "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"**
 - their challenge is built on the assumption that they are right, that they are

- custodians of God's Law, interpreters of the Scriptures...
- But Jesus turns round their challenge to challenge their assumptions:
 - in his question exposing what they are really thinking, and how others have responded differently to Jesus... **we have concluded an upstart, but others have concluded from God....**
 - its an **unsettling** response, and deliberately so
- **But they seek to dodge the question...**
 - the whole **"don't know..."** thing is just a way of not admitting to the crowd what they really think!
 - he wants them to think... they want to look good in front of the crowd, exert their authority, cover their backs...
 - but Jesus won't let things rest... and he uses this conversation as the launching point for his parable of the tenants;
 - **he's not going to let them off the hook!**

Parable of the Tenants (vs.12:1-12)

- Who's who is fairly clear - unusually clear, for one of Jesus' parables!
 - **Owner** - God
 - **Tenants** - priests and Jewish leaders
 - **Servants** - prophets
- Implication is that you (**the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders**) have not **actually** done what was asked of you
 - you've signed the "tenancy agreement", signed on the dotted line, professed your faith, read the Scriptures...
 - but it ain't working out the way it should!
 - you've got it wrong...!
 - **you aren't good enough to do this by yourself.... will you admit it?**
- But then into the story Jesus introduces a final twist.... **the son** - Jesus himself
 - who is killed, but whose death prompts the restoration of the vineyard to its proper owner
 - we have here a prediction of Jesus own death, only days away now, and a demonstration of how his death was not failure but **fulfilment of prophecy!**
- So Jesus is asking of the rulers... and anyone listening on:
 - so who do you think I am?
 - what is your faith all about?
 - are you sure where you stand with God?
 - for its only in bowing the knee to me that true assurance may be found!

Unsettled?

- When we have been unsettled by someone asking hard questions of us, we are inevitably left with a **choice**:
 - to **reject the insight**, the to deflect the probing, to continue as we are, ignoring the thrust of whatever questions have unsettled us;
 - or we can **embrace the questions** and seek to change, grow, respond
- When Prof Sidney Michaelson asked me those hard questions my (proud!) response was to say **"I'll show you..."** and work all the harder on the project, which ended up going very well!
 - but **responding that way was painful** - for the starting point was admitting what I'd done to that point wasn't up to scratch!
 - and **none of us likes to admit we're not good enough...**
- In fact, **neither response is painless!**
 - **to dodge such questions troubles us**, unless we work very hard to suppress it
 - and **to respond to the questions** often means admitting our past weakness or failure
- How has Jesus ever unsettled us?

- it may be that we are realising we've never fully embraced the Christian faith for ourselves... admitted we are wrong, accepted Christ as Saviour... we are unsettled
- and true peace will only come as we, in humility, confess our sin and accept Jesus as Lord
- but dodging the questions won't be painless either!
- there's a poem called [The Hound of Heaven, by Francis Thompson](#)

- That poem begins like this:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
 Up vistaed hopes I sped;
 And shot, precipitated,
 Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
 But with unhurrying chase,
 And unperturbed pace,
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 They beat - and a Voice beat
 More instant than the Feet-
 "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

- [Jesus is often like a hound, persistently pursuing us:](#)
 - he [loves us dearly](#), as children, and would not have us lost!
- Or it may be that we are already Christians... and the unsettling that Jesus is doing is in some area of our lives that needs to be more fully given over to his control.
- [Whatever our situation, when unsettled we can have two responses:](#)
 - [run away...](#)
 - or [respond, work it through!](#)
 - [which will you choose?](#)