

When I was young and having a strop to myself, my mum used to tell me to *get off your high horse*. I never knew what she meant because I wasn't on a horse, high or otherwise, and it took me years to understand what the expression meant. I must have been acting smart or clever, and I now appreciate that there is nothing more annoying than someone who is convinced they are better than us. Whether they are richer or brighter, or prettier or stronger, there are those who love going around on their high horse.

When I was at school, and I don't think things have changed that much, cliques ruled the place. Every possible grouping of people had their own label and identity. There were skinheads and hippies or freaks, the sporty crowd and the geeky academic kids. It's ironic that it's in school, the very place where we should be prepared for the expansive possibilities of our futures, that we tightly pigeon-hole each other.

***Jesus failed to fit into any of the preconceived plans people had for a Messiah, a Leader and a Saviour.*** And the first generations of Jesus' disciples failed to fit into any of the cultural conceptions of what a religious community looked like, for the first Christians weren't Jews or Gentiles. These Christians performed rites and rituals that sounded salacious and suspicious, what was that about drinking the blood and eating the body of a dead man? Isn't that cannibalism? And that stuff about everyone loving each other? These Christians kissed each other on the cheek when they met, regardless of social rank or colour or economic status.

The truth was these Christians came together to sing and pray, to talk and give thanks. When those first Christians celebrated, the wine did not flow and the moral boundaries did not disappear. In a world where religious ecstasy, mysterious secret rites and sexual excess were normal, these Christians weren't worse or better than others. They were just very different, so different that it was hard finding any category to place them in.

If you've survived school, or perhaps even adulthood, you will know that being tagged as different is rarely a good thing. Even though Jesus tried to keep a low profile, being different got Jesus in trouble with the Jewish religious leaders, who then quickly passed him on to the Roman political leaders where he got in more trouble. ***Being different paved Jesus' path to the cross.***

Embodying Jesus' *differentness* got the first Christians in trouble too. They didn't fit within Judaism, and they stood completely outside the pagan cultic traditions. The first century religious world didn't know what to make of those disciples who followed a crucified criminal. Eventually Judaism, which was already on the suspect list of the Roman Empire, chose to distance itself from these Christians. Eventually Rome persecuted the Christians in the carnage that was the Coliseum, where the Christians versus Lions was a game with a predictable out-come.

So how did Christians gain their *holier-than-thou* reputation with some people? Where did this *better-than-you* reputation come from? Being Christian has never been about being better than others, it's always been about living with different values than the world. We live and celebrate a very different kind of victory than others understand; a victory that starts with a death on a cross and whose end was not yet come. ***The gospel is less about 'better' than 'different.'*** ***Disciples of Jesus are not just called to be 'better' but to be 'different.'***

Being different, living different is the life-blood which keeps the circulation of the body alive and separated from the rest of the world, even while living in its midst. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and taught them to look at three ways Christians were to be different.

***First, they were to be Wise. Second, they were Worshipful, and third, they were wondrously Wayward!*** First, Christians are called to be wise. What does wise mean? Does this mean no one can be a Christian unless they have qualifications, or a Ph.D in something clever? No, being wise means something very different than being clever or educated.

Being wise is rooted in ancient wisdom literature where being wise meant not being mired down in the world. Those who are wise look beyond the end of their own influence, beyond the extension of those who hold the power to something and someone greater, God. Wisdom means you're not limited by the world's idea of smart or clever. That's why the world can sometimes see wisdom as foolishness. The Apostle Paul defined wisdom as living in accordance with God's dreams, not the world's schemes. Wisdom is faith and trust in Jesus the Christ and His life and death, resurrection and return. Wisdom is acknowledging our complete dependence upon God's redemptive purposes, where death is cheated and life and love emerge triumphant. This Godly wisdom doesn't rely on reason, it listens to the Holy Spirit and looks to Christ's continual presence and guidance.

When early anthropologists were looking for something to define the uniqueness of the human species, they came up with the name homo-sapiens, which means wise human." It is wisdom of a particular kind that separates humans from our fellow creatures, and this wisdom takes us beyond self, and beyond the attitude that others do not matter. This is why Christians give themselves to people and causes that cost them dearly in terms of time, work and money. Why do Christians put so much effort caring for others when there's no profit in it? Why do we care for our planet for future generations when we know we will be okay? It's because Christians are different and we have Godly wisdom.

***Second, Christians are different because they are worshipful.*** Early cultic worship was strange and scary, with blood-letting, burnt-offerings, temple prostitutes and worse! The false gods of the first century were pernicious, petulant and dangerous. The gods of the twenty-first century, now to be found in the City or Wall Street, still bear the same traits. And many of the same names: Hermes, Nike, Amazon, Trojan, Mars, Argos to name but a few.

Unlike the worship these false Gods demanded, the worship that flows from the body of Christ consists only of thanksgiving.

The tradition we call the Lord's Supper was handed down from early Christian liturgical tradition is also known as the Eucharist. When we symbolically take of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine, the first century pagans assumed this was some rite of eating and drinking sacrificial victims. But all Eucharist means is thanksgiving. The Lord's Supper is nothing more than an act of thanksgiving for all that God has graciously done and made available to us.

All of worship; hymns, prayers, readings, everything uttered in worship should be about thankfulness. Thankfulness lies at the centre of the Christian heart and it's the power behind our communal heartbeat. Only intentional thankfulness can keep the lifeblood of the church flowing freely. This is what it means to live in Eucharistic community, the church!

***Third, Christians are called to be wondrously wayward.*** Paul didn't quite say it in this way, but he tells the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit. What he was really saying here is: ***Don't let the world direct your way, your path, your life or your vision. Allow the Spirit of God to take hold and lead you. In other words, be different from the world. Be wayward!*** And to save you looking up the word in the dictionary, wayward is defined as one who is perversely turned away. To be wayward is to act in a way that's opposite to what's expected. And that's precisely what Jesus calls us to do and be, for if we're following Christ where He's calling us to go, we will by the world's standards live wayward lives. How exciting eh?

It is wayward to spend time doing something that will bring you no reward or credit, but will make a huge reward to someone's life. It's wayward to spend your time volunteering to work in a charity shop where you get no pay and often no thanks but other, perhaps patients or homeless people benefit. It's wayward to give money to causes that mean that people we will never meet get basic food, medicine and shelter. It's wayward to do something without asking *what do I get?* ***We say we follow Jesus? Then let's get off our high horses and be wise, worshipful and wayward!***

I want to end this sermon this morning with a story of one man's dare to be different and to step out of line and be wise, worshipful, and wayward. His name is Buzz Aldrin, and nearly fifty years ago he and Neil Armstrong were the first men on the moon. At the time of the moon landing Buzz Alrin was a member of a Presbyterian Church in Texas. Prior to leaving earth, he talked to his pastor about the possibility of marking their moon landing with the Lord's Supper. And the pastor gave Aldrin a home communion kit to take with him.

When his colleagues heard what Alrin was proposing to do, celebrate the Eucharist on the moon, they immediately told him how wayward this was. A women called Murray O'Hare was threatening the government with a lawsuit every other day for pushing Christianity in the public arena. Neil Armstrong said he wanted no part of it. So Aldrin dropped his idea, until a moment arose and he seized it again.

From his place in the space capsule, Buzz Aldrin directed his words to the American people, and called on them to observe a time of silence out of gratitude for their safe landing on the moon. In the midst of that silence, Aldrin took out the communion kit his pastor had given him, poured some wine and gave himself communion, speaking these words from **John 15:5**, the first words from the Bible spoken on the desolate surface of the moon: ***I am the Vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me, and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. But without me you can do nothing.***

The first liquid poured out on the moon was communion wine. What an amazing example of Eucharistic living, be wise, worshipful, and wonderfully wayward! **Amen**

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