

Next time we have a church Quiz Night I think we should have a round on 'Heavenly Twins' – who were Euodia and Syntyche, or Cosmas and Damien, Og and Sihon, or Cyril and Methodius, or perhaps Eldad and Medad? I remember the latter from Sunday School years ago; they had a very satisfying pair of names, and they prophesied, which was even better.

You have to feel sorry for Moses. He's been doing his utmost to keep the children of Israel together, focused on the journey and obedient to God. But there was a rabble among the people. There's always a rabble. Always people who are discontented. Always the 'glass half full' brigade. The grumblers, the pessimists, the barrack-room lawyers. The people who always know how much better everything used to be, and why everything has gone to the dogs, and just what 'they' ought to do to put everything right. But these people never actually do anything themselves, they can always point to other people who are breaking the rules, and they know that whatever 'ought to be done' should only affect other people, never themselves. We all know people like this – hopefully not too many of them. They are the people who somehow suck all the joy and all the energy out of any situation.

Moses has got the Israelites out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and found them shelter, water and manna in the desert, all with God's help. Despite all this, the people are grumbling. So Moses entreats God yet again. You can hear his frustration. And while he and seventy of the elders are having a solemn, spirit-filled session with God at the tent of meeting, one of his team comes running up and says there are these two blokes, Eldad and Medad, who are prophesying in the camp. He's outraged. People can't just prophesy anywhere. Surely this is something that only Moses is allowed to do? It's just not right. Moses ought to stop them, straight away.

The Gospel reading is a very close parallel. Jesus has been healing people, then teaching his disciples about simplicity and humility. The argument about who was the most important has just taken place, as has his use of a child as the symbol of the best way to approach God. Then John, who is not usually someone who argues, protests that they have seen someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, and they have tried to stop him. The reason he gives is revealing: 'He was not following us'. He's not one of our group. He isn't a proper disciple. We're the people who should do that sort of thing. Maybe John is jealous. It wasn't long ago that the disciples tried to cast out a demon and failed. This man isn't one of us. He doesn't belong. He isn't qualified. He doesn't know how to do it properly. Jesus shouldn't let him. After all, if just anyone can cast out demons, the disciples aren't as special as they like to think they are.

Neither Joshua nor John get the answer they want. Moses and Jesus both respond in the same way. Leave them alone. Don't interfere. It's wonderful that someone is doing this – would that everyone did the same.

For someone to be able to prophesy or to cast out demons they have to be completely open to God, so that God can work through them. Nothing must get in the way, no ego – whatever steps are necessary to ensure that openness must be taken to enable the word or the action to come through. Jesus elaborates. His examples are metaphorical, but they demonstrate the level of commitment and surrender that is needed, to the extent of sacrificing a part of oneself rather than obstructing the will of God. We are reminded of the ultimate example of Mary and her simple response to Gabriel: 'Let it be with me according to your word'.

If something is genuinely done or said in the name of Christ – even something as simple as offering a drink of water – it is a worthy action. It doesn't matter who does it. Conversely, anything which puts difficulties in the way of straightforward, simple faith, child-like in that it

is open and whole-hearted, is condemned, especially if it is done by someone who claims to be acting in the name of Christ. This is where we have to take a hard look at ourselves, both as individuals and as a Christian community.

Do we think that there are people who call themselves Christians but who 'aren't doing it properly'? Who aren't part of our group? Who don't understand what we understand? Do you find particular sorts of Christians difficult to get on with? They are irritating, they don't do things the way you do, perhaps they are wrong; perhaps they are not really Christian? I have to confess that I encountered some overtly Evangelical Christians at work who really annoyed me. They wouldn't share a prayer room with Muslims but wanted their own special space, and prayer groups at lunchtime. When they found I was a priest they wanted me to acknowledge them as 'special' people and treat them differently from others. This wasn't my way of doing things, as you can probably hear from the way I describe them. But maybe they were simply living their faith in the way that worked for them.

Are there things we do, or expect, or just take for granted as a church community, that get in other people's way (and so get in God's way)? We must think hard about this as we work on the next version of our Mission Action Plan. How can we be open, welcoming, receptive and non-judgemental? When we look at what is important to us at St Peter's, and what we want to preserve and grow, are we putting stumbling blocks in the path of people who would like to join us but feel that there are things to know and do, and boxes to tick, before they will be accepted? Do we disparage other people's faith because they worship in very different ways from us? Do we even realise that this is what we are doing?

Remember Moses: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets'. Remember Jesus: 'Whoever is not against us is for us'. All people will be lifted up. Everyone can be saved. It is not for us to judge.