

Hello everybody

That poem called how to cut a pomegranate is all about how to cut a pomegranate without making a mess. A good solid practical type of poem.

Treat it delicately, with respect

But of course the poet isn't just writing about a fruit, he speaking about a much broader view of the pomegranate. Like all poetry you get to choose what it's about and what it means and how it affects your life.

So what happens if you think of this as the bible.

Just slit the upper skin on the story and what tumble out is a whole range of stories.

Stories about people and their lives whose lives actually seem to be pretty much like our don't they?

People making things happen

People disagreeing

People looking for knowledge

People following others because they see something special in them. When it comes to the gospel; story that all fits easily into place.

It may not be a comforting story all the time, but you know who the main characters are God and Jesus.

And Jesus followers and his opponents.

So maybe it's a bit of a shock when you move onto the book of Acts, the letters and the book of the revelation.

The simple outline of one man and his followers disappears.

Things don't seem so easy or neat, do they?

Jesus, God and now the Holy Spirit are still the central characters, but you get to know this trinity better through people, a whole host of people as jewels of the world tumble out.

These people speak to each other about the good news they have discovered.

And some like Peter and John are characters we recognise from the gospels. We already know something about their personalities. We have expectations of how they will behave.

We know that Peter always need to be told the same thing three times before he understands and we know John is always involved in some way or other.

But not far into the book of Acts we meet a lot of other who come tumbling out of the bible stories into our lives with nuggets of knowledge to help us each day.

There is Steven and Philip, Saul who becomes Paul somehow. James the brother of Jesus who seems to hold some kind of mediating role in the early church. Don't forget Barnabas who brings Paul into the church at Antioch and then like the hairy bikers are sent off by the Spirit on journeys to spread the good news.

But Luke tells us in acts at chapter 13 that they have a helper called John Mark. Luke doesn't tell us what John Mark does. He may well be some kind of fixer some think, be that the case we do discover quite early on that he knows his own mind.

Barnabas, Paul and John Mark visit Cyprus and meet with success in spreading the good news and the number of believers grows.

They decide to continue their missionary work on the main land of Asia Minor (Turkey), but Luke tells us that John Marks leaves them at this point to return to Jerusalem.

The immediate question hanging over the team at this point is a simple why? Luke doesn't tell us why.

Later on, though Barnabas suggests that Paul and he take John Mark along on a different trip, but Paul simply says no and Barnabas and Paul separate. Barnabas Sailed away to Cyprus with John Mark, who we discover from a letter Paul writes to the Colossians, is a relative of Barnabas.

Luke leads us to believe that Paul saw John Mark's earlier behaviour on Cyprus as a simple desertion of his colleagues and Paul chose to take Silas as a companion and they went through Syria.

It is easy to see all these individuals tumbling out of the story isn't it?

The bible is full of real people, if we take time to stop and think about them.

So what should we make of all these people?

What about John Mark?

Was he trustworthy?

Have we acted like him in our lives?

Do we know someone similar?

What do we make of a minor character like John Mark in this story?

Was he a minor character as Luke seems to shape him or was he instrumental in shaping how we still view the church today?

Remember a few weeks ago we considered Peter's angel-assisted escape from jail?

His first thought was to go to the house of Mary and who is Mary, none other than the mother of John whose other name is Mark.

Most believe this to be the same John Mark who accompanied Barnabas and Paul, yes but whose family also had very strong links with Peter's family.

And in fact tradition has it, backed by much circumstantial evidence and believed by man, that this John Mark is the writer of the gospel according to Mark and what he wrote were Peter's own

recollections of his time with Jesus in his ordered sequence.

It seems that John Mark, who in Luke's view is a deserter; someone who lets Paul down, was actually a very important person in the history of the early church. Definitely on par with Paul, yet given only a walk on part by Luke.

The story of Cats is like that pomegranate treat it delicately, with respect and the jewels of the world tumble out.

More precious than garnets

More lustrous than rubies

Lit as if from inside

Each jewel contains a living seed and seeds grow in people and plants fruit and spread.

John Mark's story is a reminder that as we tell our stories what we think as important or what we think of as inconsequential may be difficult to judge accurately.

Think through your life .

What are some of your John Mark moments?

The people who you met at the time who you didn't really notice, but on looking back were very important.

When I think of the jewels tumbling out of the pomegranate, I remember a man called Frank who loved cricket, smoked a pipe and came to a faith through reading a book. He loved to tell a story of falling off a roof when he fell asleep one night while on guard duty in the RAF.

I didn't know him well until after he had retired and never discovered his occupation, but his advice on growing sweet peas and selecting which to put into a show has stuck with me for many years along.

Then there was Peter who took a new minister and gently shared much good advice such as never visit too early in the day, you might find someone in their pyjamas and remember when you are visiting a patient in hospital, most like to be cheered up and made to laugh.

Good advice.

So when you split open the pomegranate of your life, be prepared for the jewels of the world to come tumbling to you. There are many and all fit together to

give us each a unique experience but remember too we will tumble out into other people's lives too. People to treat delicately, with respect.

And where do we find the inspiration, well from the bible of course.

When we slit the fruit of the bible open, all manner of jewels tumble out, each one there to help us with something in life.

We are never alone.

Even when things seem to be going so wrong.

God love us,

Jesus died for us and because of that we can have hope for the future.

Peace be with you,

Amen

