

Trinity 3C 03/07/22

Have you ever seen a mimosa plant? When touched, the fern-like leaves of the *mimosa pudica* fold inward and droop downward. This action has a domino effect: the touched leaf folds and droops, and then the next, and the next. It looks like the plant is literally shrivelling up and dying right in front of you. *Mimosa* is a Greek word meaning to mimic. *Pudica* is Latin for “shy,” “bashful,” or “shrinking.” So, I guess you could say that the *mimosa pudica* is mimicking shyness.

The *mimosa pudica* is known by many names. In Australia, the U.S. and UK where it is a weed it is also known as “Sensitive Plant,” “Humble Plant,” “Shame Plant,” “Prayer Plant,” “Tickle-Me-Plant,” and “Touch-Me-Not.” In Spanish, it is called, *mori-vivi* (“I died, I lived”). In Tonga, it is called *mateloi* (“false death”). In Burmese, it is called *hti ka yoan*, which means “crumbles when touched.” In Indonesia, it is *putri malu* (“shy princess”).

When it comes to sharing our faith story, why are we Anglicans (and those of many other denominations, I suppose) such *mimosa pudicas*? Are we “Sensitive Plants,” “Humble Plants,” or “Shame Plants”; in other words, are we too sensitive, are we too humble, or are we just ashamed of the Gospel? Are we “Touch-Me-Nots,” “Shy Princesses”? Are we cold, haughty, or insecure? When the opportunity comes for us to make a spiritual connection with someone, we fold inward and shrink down. The most important thing to us in these moments is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ or our mission to spread it but, rather, we care only about protecting ourselves. What if our intentions are misinterpreted or we’re asked a question we can’t answer, or people think we’re weird or obsessive, or someone yells at us or just turns his/her back and walks away?

No one knows for sure why the *mimosa pudica* shrivels up at first contact. Is it worried that it will be consumed or damaged? Is it shaking off harmful bugs? It also closes up if any of its leaves feels direct heat. Because it grows like a weed and has a tendency to become fuel for grass fires, it fears heat. It also fears cold: it closes up at night and opens in the morning.

We too fear that we might be eaten up, beaten up, or pestered by those we speak to about our faith. And when it comes to the Spirit of God, we fear being caught up in the fire as much as we fear freezing to death by its absence in our lives. Let’s face it, we’re much more comfortable speaking of our heavenly Father than we are of speaking of the crucified Son or the Holy Spirit. But we are Christians, and you can’t spell Christian without Christ, and you can’t know God without knowing the Spirit that Christ sent to be with us until he returns! We must find a way to put aside our fear and move from that which dies upon touch to *mori-vivi* (“I died, I lived”).

It takes the mimosa about thirty minutes to return to its original open state from an encounter with heat or touch. We could probably learn to shake off a bad faith encounter much quicker than that! Jesus told us how in today’s Gospel.

First, he assured us that the harvest was plentiful. So often we do not have to go out and gather seed, plant it carefully, water it, watch over it. God has already planted seeds of faith everywhere, then nurtured and guarded them. They merely need to be harvested.

So, when we start to shrivel up as we face the task of sharing our faith, we need to know that the person in front of us has more than likely been carefully prepared for that moment. He/she has

most likely already experienced God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The harvester merely collects the bounty from another's work.

You're not telling the people you share your faith with anything they don't already know. What you're doing is helping them understand what they've already experienced in life by making a personal connection. They see how your experiences connect with theirs and thus see theirs in a whole new light: the very light of Christ.

The English writer Ben Jonson, playwright and poet once said that William Shakespeare's gift was that he wrote "what was often thought but never so well expressed." Shakespeare wasn't a genius because he was a master of original thought; his genius was that he mastered the art of expressing the thoughts we all have in a new, clearer way. We don't read Shakespeare to understand him better; we read Shakespeare in order to understand ourselves better. He told his stories to help us better understand our stories and our lives. We tell our faith stories to others so they will see and understand their stories more clearly and thus see.

Jesus sent out seventy disciples to heal the sick and proclaim the nearness of the kingdom. He sent them out in twos: no one was to walk alone. We heal and proclaim in community; God works through congregated people. We are sent to gather the harvest: people are waiting for us, desperate to be brought in. The way will not be easy, and we are to rely totally on God for what we need.

If the message is rejected, we are to simply walk away, but it is essential that we deliver it. If we do this, we will watch Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning, we will tread on snakes and scorpions without being harmed, we will live in the kingdom now... free from fear, free from despair, free at last, free at last, great God almighty, free at last!

So, what about our fears of being eaten up, beaten up, or pestered by those we evangelise? As I promised, today's Gospel has an answer for that. "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you." No one can take away the peace you find in the Lord. Offer that peace to those to whom you speak: if they accept it, wonderful; if not, it returns to you unaltered. As you proclaim that the kingdom of God is near at hand, there's no time to worry about what people think of you because of your proclaiming it. After all, spreading the good news is a life-and-death matter, for the listener and the teller!

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