CLERGY CONFERENCE

Mark 1: 29-39

Our aim for the conference is to help people to understand more clearly the interface between the

church and the secular world, and to discover how we can be more effective in bridging the gaps.

Jesus heals and restores - restores people like Simon's mother in law to their place in family and community. He cures and he casts out demons. So what we looking is how good the good news is - restoration of those oppressed to a full role in their communities; it has to do with creating a people raised up to serve each other. And people do come in numbers, trusting that Jesus will heal and restore. Remember that Linda stressed the importance of healing as an aspect of the ministry of any church which is showing signs of life

This seems to me to be about a radical engagement with the sin and sickness of the world. It is the good news not just as words but as living reality.

So what are the implications of this for us as we try to find a point of engagement with the secular world. It seems to me that it makes some of what we do - rather feeble efforts to interest a very secular society in church-going and church membership - look like rather less than is required. It is about some of what Linda said about the challenge of discipleship. You will know that I come times say that we need to move from a paradigm of membership to a paradigm of discipleship. Membership is flat - it means that we become a service organisation directed towards meeting the needs of our own members. It makes our sometimes rather organisational approaches to the development and growth of our church look functional rather than spiritually radical. Discipleship is dynamic, engages, obedient, responsive and growth-orientated.

The challenge for us is to recognise what we are looking at in our world - endemic relationship breakdown; deep personal unhappiness; long term damage to people's well being - as the sicknesses of our age. We aren't good at finding words - particularly spiritual words with which to describe them. And apart from adding them to the intercession list, I'm not sure that we have anything else to offer.

Except of course that we do. Sometimes we are unhelpfully adversarial in our analysis of where we are. I'm not sure if it is helpful to say that it is a choice between world-accommodating and world refusing. More maybe that we are world accepting in love - world challenging in faith - world healing in ministry