

## High St Uniting Church Frankston

### Selective deafness

Matthew 11:16 - 19, 25 - 30



*When I joined Toyota in 1990, part of the induction was a full examination at the Medical Centre, and that included a hearing test. There I sat with the headphones on waving at the nurse when I heard something. At the end she said I had good hearing, to which I responded, "Tell my wife that." She told me, "No, we can't test for selective deafness."*

And that is what is going on in the reading today with the strange parable of the children in the market shouting about

flutes and mourning. Like children obsessed with what they are on about and deaf to the needs of others, the people of Jesus day selectively tuned out the messages of both John the Baptist and Jesus because those messages didn't match what they wanted to hear.

John came wearing strange clothes, preaching a strong message of repentance, and living on what little he could find in the wilderness. He didn't join in the feasts or festivities and told those who would listen that religious observance was not enough, you had to live your life in accordance with the principles of love and justice. The people, who loved feasts and festivities and living a life of pleasure and gain, rejected John, and tuned out his message; they were selectively deaf to the hard call for repentance and justice.

We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance.

Jesus came and joined in all the feasts and festivities but also focussed on those who were on the fringe and on the outside of society – the so-called tax collectors and sinners. He had a message much like John - repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. And he lived the message of justice that John preached; going beyond the idea of being the select people of God and Law by sharing meals with the unacceptable. The people, who were trained to live a holy and religious life, rejected Jesus, and tuned out his message. They were selectively deaf to the call for forgiveness and inclusion.

We wailed, and you did not mourn.

Selective deafness. Being in a church community can be comfortable and we tune out the messages that are uncomfortable and challenging. We tend to not hear the message and ministry of John because we don't like 'hellfire and brimstone' preaching. And we tend to not hear the message of Jesus going out amongst the people because we like sitting in the church where it's not threatening. But we forget, John baptised Jesus; one integrated message. The gospel is both as serious and life threatening as John's call for repentance and as uncontrollable and beyond our cultural sensibilities as Jesus eating meals with sinners.

It is easy to live in the comfortable place of being forgiven without having to do anything about it. It is easy to be exclusive and only share with people like us. The gospel is not easy, it calls us to give our whole self to God, faults, weaknesses, wilfulness, and pride. And it calls for inclusion and lived forgiveness.

In the letter to Timothy, Paul used this wonderful little expression - "itching ears."

*People will not put up with sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires.*

Same message from a different direction. People don't want to hear the hard call of the gospel; they want an easy way to be with God.

The hard call to repentance is not heard because we don't feel guilty, we're good people and members of the church. Jesus loves us and has forgiven us, now let's get on with living our lives.

The hard call to look beyond ourselves to share with those in need is not heard, because we do good works and charity, we help where we can. We're not evangelists or preachers, let's get on with being church members.

Selective deafness. We hear the good bits of the Gospel – the good news for us. Yes, we are forgiven and loved in the grace offered through Jesus Christ and yes, we are called to love our neighbour and offer help where we can. But we also choose to not hear the hard call of the Gospel.

Repentance is about more than confession of sin and asking for forgiveness, repentance is about a change in direction for your life. God's call is for all our life as we live in faith and hope and love, obedient to the will of God and looking for the direction of the Spirit.

Love of neighbour is about more than charity and good deeds. The hard call of the gospel is to share your life with those in need; share their table as well as your own, listen to their story and their point of view and share the good news of God's love in your life by embracing theirs.

Let us not be like the children in the marketplace, expecting the Gospel to dance to our tune but be open to the tune that God is playing in and through Jesus and the Spirit. A tune that will make us dance with joy when the load is lifted from those who are struggling and mourn with those suffering through injustice and pride.