

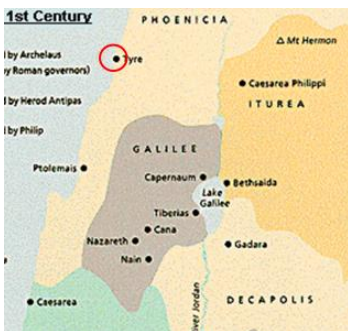
There is much in the news about politics both here and in the States.

Not least among the stories is the coverage of the appointment of a new judge to the Supreme court, one **Judge Kavanaugh**.

There has been a lot of protest and concern, as it is feared he may tip the balance of the bench toward conservatism. The whole process is a matter of judging the judge. And that’s the issue that was raised for me when I read the letter of James, where he warns Christians to take care lest they become “Judges with evil thoughts”.



However, before going further with that, I’d also like to explore the **Gospel reading** (Mark 7. 24 ff) set down for today to go with the one James. (James 2. 1-8,14-17)



At first glance they seem to have little to do with each other. In fact, this little story of Jesus travelling with his disciples from Genessaret to Tyre is quite challenging in its own right. It has long puzzled commentators because Jesus’ words to the poor woman, taken at face value, seem unsympathetic at best and downright harsh at worst; quite unlike anything we have

come to expect from Jesus when faced with a person in distress and in deep need of his healing grace.

Part of the issue, I believe, arises from the context, and part from the difficulty of translating an idiom from one language to another – familiar expressions and turns of phrase well understood in one language can become incomprehensible when rendered in another.

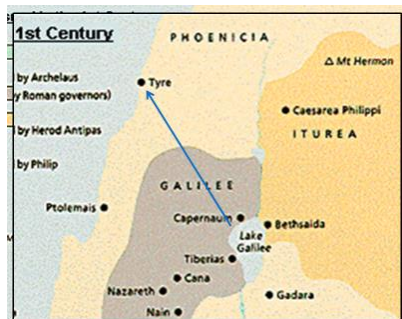
If I told a Kiwi with a large parcel to “put it in the boot” they would know exactly what I meant, but an American, new to this country,

would be extremely puzzled – and that’s when speaking the same language! And many Americans are startled to find that a Kiwi is actually a bird, not just a piece of fruit.

Then there is the age-old tradition of making good-humoured fun of another culture. We do it with the Aussies all the time, and one of our most celebrated humourists was a past-master at the genre.

(Billy T video clip)

A visual jibe at pompous British justice, and an Irish joke to boot, beautifully carried off by a Maori.



So here we have Jesus and his friends **traveling** a long way into a foreign country. Today Google maps says it’s a 22-hour journey on foot – at least a couple or three days, with the border between Israel and Phoenicia about half way. (c/f Lebanon & Israel)

I bet they were swapping jokes about Greeks and

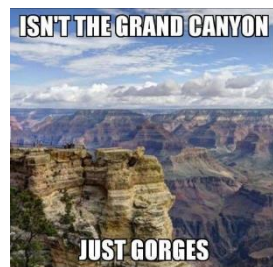
Gentiles to pass the time as they walked along. I wonder if **puns** were part of the humour of the day?

Google came up with well over 35 doggy puns, like - ‘Don’t drop your nibbles on the floor while watching the rugby, or you’ll end up with a wide retriever!’

or ‘I don’t have a cold, I’m just a little husky.’”

And it was common at the time for Jews to be quite derisive about anyone who wasn’t Jewish. Even Jesus says early in Matthew’s Gospel “Don’t give that which is holy to the dogs.”

The Greek word means a ‘hound’ – more likely a pack of mangy strays



Now why were they going, and who would they stay with in this Gentile town? (NB the Jewish Diaspora)

As God-fearing Jews with strict laws about associating with Gentiles, it would need to be Jewish home. Mark records the story, probably from the mouth of Peter, who has yet to have his Jewish attitudes challenged by God at a much later date. And even though Jesus wanted privacy, a bunch of bearded strangers arriving in a town where most males were clean-shaven would certainly have been noticed, and raised a buzz of interest.

So, the rumours of a visiting healer found their way to the Greek mother, at her wits end over the malady afflicting her precious little daughter. Immediately she grasps this slender thread of hope and runs to the home where Jesus is staying and **throws** herself at his feet.



And here we have this extraordinary exchange. In response to the women's plea, Jesus says "Let the children be fed **first**, for it's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"



It sounds like Jesus has in mind some order of priority, but what if, knowing that his friends thought of themselves as the children of Abraham, and maybe voicing a well-known idiom, Jesus actually said something like - "Well you know what these guys are thinking - 'It's not fair to throw the children's food to their **puppies**'" and despite the urgency of her mission, this woman, at home in her own country, where Jesus and his friends are the foreigners, has the sharpness of mind and the self-confidence to respond in kind. "Ah, but even the puppies under the table eat the chunks of bread the children drop!"



You see, when you eat your food with your fingers a chunk of bread is the easiest thing to use to clean the gravy off your fingers. Just like that little paper napkin they use to wrap the knife and fork at the Hive.

Delighted with her quick reply Jesus immediately grants her dearest wish. He was a man of compassion and would have read the pain in this young mother's eyes. But some commentators believe that Jesus was so focused on his mission to the Jews he was prepared to ignore the plight of this Gentile.

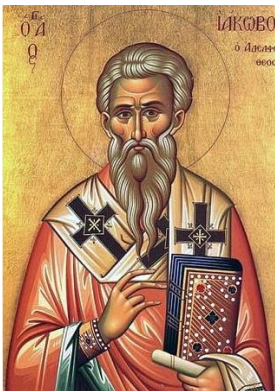
- What do you think?
(chat with your neighbour)



Well whatever was in his mind do you judge he did the right thing?

It's that sort of judgement call we make all the time and James is just setting out a couple of examples of what Jesus meant when he affirmed the importance of Torah where it says "Love your neighbour"

But don't stop there – love those you don't like very much – even make the stretch to love your enemies.



And that means, in **James'** view, that you need to check your scale of values, your internal frame of reference . . . those instinctive and unexamined attitudes . . . you use every day - on people you meet; counter-staff in shops; the Philippino check-out woman whose name you read but daren't try to pronounce.

We may not have the range of people coming into our congregation when we meet for worship that James obviously envisaged, but then we just might at say a parenting class, or at Mainly Music. Thankfully Protestants and Catholics get on much better now, here in New Zealand, but Blacks and Latinos don't seem to fare so well in Trump's version of America.

But the question remains, how do we avoid the danger James clearly saw in his day - of Christians who become “judges with evil thoughts”?

However, before we address that question, a little unpacking may be helpful to be sure the point James is making is not ‘lost in translation’

The Greek word James has chosen here is “Kakos,” a primary word which is often correctly used where ‘evil’ is the appropriate and more-or-less literal translation. But it also carries the idea of a ‘wrong way of thinking’ . . . or something (like an approach, or a way of doing things) that is, according to the Greek lexicon, ‘not such as it ought to be.’

“Not such as it ought to be” – “A wrong way of thinking.”

A prejudice perhaps, a stereotypical attitude to someone of another ethnicity, particularly if their skin is deeply coloured, . . . or any one of the familiar ‘isms’ . . . or the somewhat negative and condescending (but unspoken) thoughts we may harbour about someone who is markedly different from us . . . or doesn’t give proper heed to our cherished way of doing things. That’s what James is talking about, and it can be much more insidious than we realise. So how, as Christians, do we keep our thinking straight when it comes to making the multitude of personal assessments – judgements – we make every day? (discuss)

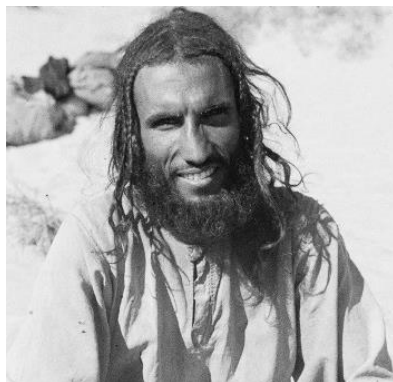
I think we’ve known the answer since Micah’s day. As I said to the children –

Be fair . . .

Be kind . . .

and as that old gospel song goes,

‘Turn your eyes upon **Jesus**’



Rather than try to sing it, lets listen to a similar sentiment brought to us by the Irish singer, and song writer, Robin Mark and his band.

(Audio ‘Jesus, be the centre’)