

## MORE THAN KIDS

Lets begin in the traditional way – with the Loch Ness Monster!

Our very own monster was in the news last weekend where some old correspondence was discovered.

In the 1960s when the monster hunt was at its most serious, the conservationist leading the hunt was Sir Peter Scott.

He was concerned about making Nessie (if he was found) a protected species and he thought that it would help the legislation if he could give the monster an official name.

So he got in touch with the Palace to see if he could name the creature after the Queen...

Now unsurprisingly, the Palace didn't want the Queen named after someone who had hitherto been called the Monster.

And on the other hand, what self-respecting monster would want to be called Elizabeth?!! Where's the tension and threat and mystique in that?

Think of it from the monster's side. Elizabeth just doesn't work.

There's got to be a better word to use to name a monster.

Using the wrong word obviously leads to strange situations.

When my son Robbie was very small we went on holiday to France.

The day before we returned my wife Yvonne asked him what he was feeling about going home.

He answered "*Embarrassed.*"

Well that was a bit of a surprise.

A couple of weeks after our return to Glasgow I was rushed into hospital at the Victoria with kidney stones.

Yvonne asked him how he felt about his dad being rushed to hospital.

Robbie replied "*Ashamed.*"

"*Ashamed? What does ashamed mean, Robbie?*"

He thought for a moment before saying,

"*It means embarrassed.*"

Sometimes our wrong choice of words can be much more dangerous.

An example for now would be the word **migrant** to describe the **refugees** fleeing from the Middle East. The media does this a lot.

A migrant is someone who moves from one country to settle in another. That's what the word actually means.

But there's a difference between the two words.

All refugees are migrants.  
But not all migrants are refugees.

A migrant could be you and me deciding to go and live in Canada or Australia or Spain, or a Polish or Slovakian family deciding to come to live here.

If we decide to go abroad to live it's because we are hoping to improve our lot in another place – with a new challenge, a better job or the chance of some sunshine.

But we are not running away in terror. Our homes aren't bombed and we are not facing death or torture.

There's a subtle difference between the two words – and the use of the word *migrant* rather than *refugee* is just enough to suggest that maybe these people aren't real refugees – they are not to be trusted, or aren't entirely victims and in the danger they report.

There's been more than a slight reluctance to help on the part of the EU and this may at least part of the reason.

If there's an earthquake or a tsunami or a famine countries usually are quick to respond but we're not so quick to help this time.

If you read the tabloids you might say, "Well no wonder – how can the EU possibly care for the number of people?"

But the tabloids don't print the truth which those who have done their homework already know full well - that the total number of refugees comprise a tiny fraction of the population of Europe – as I said a couple of weeks ago its less than 0.04 of 1%.

For the refugees this situation is a hugely important time.  
But for us too it marks an important moment.  
It's a time to show how moral and caring and compassionate we really are.

Our reading today is one of these scenes that feature Jesus with children.

But this scene is a wee bit different.

We probably remember the time when the disciples told the kids to beat it because Jesus was tired and Jesus disagreed and even told them that people needed to become like children to enter the kingdom – a scene where Jesus pointed out some of the qualities of kids.

But this is not that time. (That time is actually in the next chapter of Mark!)

In this scene he's not asking us to be like children.

In this scene he's not talking up the wonderful qualities of kids or suggesting how cute they are.

This is not about us modelling ourselves on children – it's about how we treat them - and indeed, how we treat others.

If you look carefully at the story you'll see that Jesus picked a child as an example of someone who was not regarded well and who was liable to be overlooked – he picked a child as a way of indicating someone with no power or status or worth.

A minister called Barbara Lundblad wrote about this text:

*"Jesus wanted them to see the child. He wants us to see the child, too--and welcome the child. Not because the child is innocent or perfect or pure or cute or curious or naturally religious.*

*Jesus wanted them to welcome the child because the child was at the bottom of the social heap."*

(Barbara Lundblad: Sermon Day 1: A Hopeful Fanatic)

In Jesus' day, people were regarded differently.

There was basically no middle class.

A few were rich – most were poor.

And your worth was contained in how productive you could be.

Children were unable to make any economic contribution, they were very likely to die before reaching adulthood, they were (until then) a drain on a family's resources.

They were not considered as proper human beings until they grew up.

So they could be ignored and forgotten about and placed to one side.

Jesus' wants us to see that **all** human beings have an intrinsic worth, and while we tend to fawn over and care about the rich and powerful and so called 'important' people, what matters most in Gods eyes is how we treat the people who **aren't** like that.

So we can think about children in this context just as we can think about refugees, and the poor, the ignored, the shunned, and the needy in our own country.

We can put into practice our care for children right here in our church – even if we don't have any children of our own.

Do we care for the kids in our church?

Do we see them as someone else's concern?

Do we see them as a noise or a nuisance?

Or are we supporting the work that is being done with them?

Do we speak to the children here as well as the adults?

Do you think the children at Langside feel that they are wanted and welcome here?

There's much we can do.

We can put into practice our care for desperate asylum seekers,  
by our contact with our elected representatives in Scotland and the UK,  
we can pray for them  
and we can donate money and goods to help.  
There's much we can do.

Here's what Jesus said to his disciples.

*"Whoever welcomes in my name one of these, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me."*

(Mark 9:37)

Some years back there was an American journalist doing an article about poverty in India.

He was in a Hospice and he watched a nun in action slowly and painstakingly changing the bandages of a dying man. Even the smell in the room was unbearable.

The journalist was repelled at what he has seen but astonished that the nun could do it without complaining.

He said to the nun, *"I wouldn't do that for 1000 dollars."*

She looked back at him (in all seriousness) and answers, *"Neither would I."*

She wasn't doing it for financial reward or because it was enjoyable, or fun, or easy, or because she had nothing else to do.

She was doing it in Jesus' name, and for Jesus' sake.

I was at the game at Hampden the other week between Scotland and Germany. Before it, there was a banner held up about welcoming refugees and representatives from both sets of fans took part in holding this aloft. The picture was printed in the Daily Record on the following day.

There were also some leaflets to hand out too – to both sets of fans.

***Refugees Welcome*** was the two word headline, and as you might imagine there were all sorts of responses – most were positive.

Some weren't.

One German fan pointed at me accusingly saying *"You need to do more!"*

By 'me' I guess he meant 'Britain'.

Germany have much done more than us to date.

But one Scottish fan sneered at the leaflet when he saw it.

***"Not in my name!"*** he said, as he stormed past.

"Not in my name" can be a good expression.

But in this particular case it meant if we give help to refugees he is against it.

*Send them back home.*

*Let them drown in the sea.*

*Let them be bombed.  
I don't give a toss about these people...*

Not in my name. He's nailing his colours to the mast.

And we have to nail our colours to the mast, too.

Believe it or not, as he said those words I actually thought of Jesus' words.  
Those of us who follow Jesus have a mandate to listen to what **he** says.

It's not about **my** name. It's about **Jesus'** name.

It's in Jesus' name we welcome those in need.  
It's in Jesus' name we offer compassion.  
It's in Jesus' name we offer hope and help and put ourselves out a wee bit for others.  
It's in Jesus' name we care.

For children,  
for the forgotten,  
for the excluded,  
for the refugee,  
for the lonely,  
for the poor,  
for the needy.

It's in Jesus' name that we show welcome and care.  
In doing so,  
we follow in his steps,  
we do what he would have us do,  
and we sense the presence of God with us,  
making our world kinder and fairer and better.

Mark 9:30-37

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