

“When they heard this they were amazed” Matt 22: 22

When were you last amazed?

Amazed is not a word that we use very often these days and we have possibly never thought of it in the context of the Bible. Yet, *amazed* is used 43 times in the New Testament¹. Perhaps you are amazed or astonished now!

In Biblical Greek θαυμάζω can mean *amazed, astonished, in wonder or surprised*.² I wonder which word or phrase you remember most from this morning's gospel?

True Faith always has the ability to *amaze* or *surprise* us. This is not an aspect that is often discussed in Church, yet, as we have noted, *amazed* occurs frequently in the New Testament. It occurs 6 times in Matthew's Gospel alone (8: 10; 8: 27; 9:33; 15: 31; 21:20; 22:22 & 27:14). Perhaps we do not like God and Faith to astonish us? Yet, if people were *amazed* or *astonished* more frequently, perhaps there would be more people prepared to follow Christ? Could it be we like a staid religion which does not allow for a “*God of Surprises*” to quote the title of that well known religious book of it's day by Fr. Gerard Hughes SJ. The Pope recently said “*Today the Lord invites you to assume an attitude of humble listening and docile waiting, because the Grace of God often presents itself to us in surprising ways, which do not line up with our expectations.*”³ Pope Francis went on to say “*the Lord does not conform to prejudices. We have to force ourselves to open the mind and heart to welcome the divine reality that comes to meet us.*”

How has God amazed and surprised you?

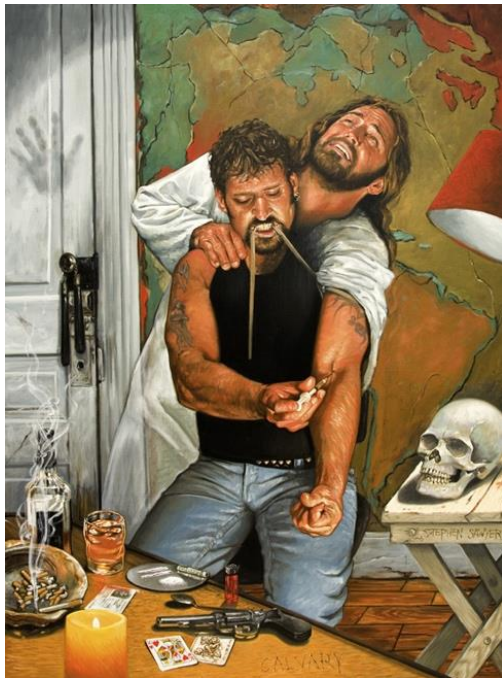
Does Christ's astonishing ministry and the action of the Holy Spirit inspire or offend you? To follow Matthew's Gospel to the end, people were amazed, yet there was disbelief at the end. How did this come to be? Why did God's Son come in the form of an uneducated carpenter's son. How did Christ become so learned that He could overcome the plotting and entrapments of the chief priests and the Pharisees? After all

¹ <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/thaumazo>

² *ibid*

³ Pope Francis 8th July 2018 <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-god-doesnt-meet-our-expectations---he-surprises-us-instead-90079>

the Incarnation was not about a well brought up, educated boy from a socially acceptable background. The Holy Family, and God, broke all the rules and social norms of the day and continue to do so today. If only we were able to 'Listen' and pray. Jesus overturns every human scheme. We need only think of Him washing His disciples feet. His forgiveness of His enemies on the Cross... Surely, this was enough to cause a scandal in any age. So where is Jesus today? Probably where we least expect to find Him! Could this picture lead us to look for Jesus in surprising places?



He is with the refugees as they make their way across the channel. Was it Jesus' neck that the policeman was kneeling on in Minneapolis?! The Gospel has a preference for the poor, the weak, those in need in our society. The pandemic has placed, in a clear spot light, the plight of these people. Wouldn't they be amazed if we acted like Christ and turned to help them!

Answering a need is how God works. We need to listen and act as St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta did. For such a diminutive follower of Christ she made a difference that was recognised across

the world. I wonder what amazing things we could achieve here simply by following God's call?

Over the centuries this morning's gospel has been misappropriated for a doctrine of Church and state. At best, the outcome is that they operate in separate spheres with the consequence that obedience to the state, in its sphere, is absolute. If you read Revelation chapters 17-18 you will see that there is a very negative view of the state (the Roman Empire).

Fr Gerard Hughes SJ in his own words was one of the many *"bewildered, confused or disillusioned Christians who have a love-hate relationship with the church to which they belong, or once belonged"*⁴. His winning ability to see God in everyday life was complemented by his refusal to be bound by dogma or denomination.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/06/gerard-w-hughes>

Pentecost 20

18th, October 20

Isaiah 45: 1-7, Psalm 96: 1-13, 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10, Matt 22: 15-22

We need to put the θαυμάζω (amazing) back into Church!

Listen! Pray! Act!

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Amen.