

The First Law of Holes

Mark 9:30-37

Put up your hand if you have heard of the Augsburg Confession? That's good . . . the Augsburg Confession is *the* foundational document of every Lutheran church. It was a revolutionary text for its time compiled by some of the most brilliant theologians of the day, including the iconic Reformers Martin Luther and his sidekick, Philip Melanchthon. If you're lucky enough to attend synod in a couple of weeks you'll probably hear it cited by both sides of whatever is being debated to legitimise their argument!

It was in 1530 that the Lutheran princes and theologians stood up for the truth and presented their understanding of the Christian faith to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg. Well, at around the same time that was happening *another* revolutionary text was taking shape. Nicolaus Copernicus was putting the finishing touches to a book he called '*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*'. This was a book that overturned 1000 years of accepted scientific, cultural and theological thinking. Copernicus contended that rather than the *earth* being the centre of the solar system, it was actually the sun that was at the centre, and the earth revolved around the sun! The earth revolved around the sun?! What a crazy idea. What a ludicrously dangerous idea!

When the great and brilliant Lutheran reformer, Philip Melanchthon, who was one of those theologians present at Augsburg . . . when he heard about Copernicus's crazy ideas he said (and I'm paraphrasing), "What an idiot! The guy's a loony . . . the earth moves and the sun stops?! That's just not right. Someone should have *Copernicus* stopped!"

Melanchthon wasn't finished . . . well, he didn't want these outlandish ideas taking hold, so he wrote an indignant book debunking Copernicus's crazy theories. In it he made three devastating and irrefutable points:

1. The evidence of the senses proves Copernicus's theory wrong.
2. The thousand-year consensus of men of science proves it wrong.
3. The authority of the Bible proves it wrong.

Case closed! Let's hear no more talk about the earth revolving around the sun! I quote the learned Dr Melanchthon: "Encouraged by this evidence, let us cherish the truth and let us not permit ourselves to be alienated from it by the tricks of those who deem it an intellectual honour to introduce confusion into the arts". Harrumph!

Mmm . . . I don't think he quite understood the first law of holes . . . when you're in a hole it's best to stop digging.

But, of course, things have moved on since then . . . science has made great strides . . . and we know now that *neither* the sun nor the earth are the centre of the universe . . . oh no, those theories are passe . . . old hat . . . now we know that *we* are the centre of the universe! And, not even 'we' collectively, but we individually! *I* am the centre of my world! It's all about *me*. Everything revolves around me. Light shines out of *me*!

“Harrumph!” I hear you think to yourself. “Come now, that’s a bit dramatic. A bit of an overstatement. It’s not even logical. What a crazy idea!”

Well, I invite you to attend a five year-old’s birthday party . . . any five year old, just pick one. I invite you to take a drive in Adelaide traffic at about five o’clock on a weekday . . . see for yourself. Or, do I need to resort to more serious examples, like a certain Vladimir Putin, or Donald ‘Making America Great Again’ Trump?!

And, speaking of ‘great’ . . . who *is* the greatest? Which one of us does the world *really* revolve around? Like the disciples we’re still kinda obsessed with that question. Look at the way we idolise and fawn over pop stars and movie stars and sports stars . . . look how we put those ‘great’ people on pedestals. To think pastors were up there once! We want to know who’s the fastest, who’s the strongest, who the smartest, who’s the humblest? Well, that one’s easy . . . that’s us Christians, isn’t it? We could compete with each other for the title of ‘the humblest’! I reckon I could win that one!

Jesus knew their thoughts . . . the disciples. I suspect Jesus knows *our* thoughts too. He asks them: “What were you arguing about on the way?” Today he might add, “What were you fighting about? What were you obsessing about? What were you feeling superior about? What were you boasting about? What were you gossiping about? What were you putting others down about? What were you invading that country about? Doesn’t it all come down to the same thing . . . the same reason . . . the same way of thinking?

“What were you arguing about?” Jesus asks. But, they were silent. They were silent. Hallelujah! For once, the disciples got it right! At least they realised their predicament and had the sense to stop digging!

Today . . . this morning . . . I hope you too have the sense to stop digging. In a short while I’ll be inviting you to be honest with yourself and with God . . . we call it a confession of sins. It’s a reminder . . . an admission . . . that you’re *not* the centre of the universe.

Now, you might want to protest quietly to yourself, if not out loud . . . you might think: “Hang on . . . is this really necessary? Confessing sins and all that! I’m not all that bad . . . actually, harrumph to all this talk about sin”. You might protest like that, but I hope you don’t . . . at least not out loud . . . because that would be a bit embarrassing.

I hope you don’t say anything . . . and not just to save my blushes. After your confession I hope you are silent . . . like the disciples . . . because that time of confession puts us in our place . . . it puts us metaphorically on our knees . . . it’s no use protesting . . . it’s no use arguing . . . it’s no use debating. It’s best just to put the shovel down.

And, when we are brought to our knees . . . when we know our place . . . *now* we can talk about who’s the greatest . . . who the world really revolves around. After all, that’s what Jesus gathers his disciples to talk about. Well, that’s what they want to know, isn’t it. Who is at the centre of everything. And, perhaps, in their silence . . . in their embarrassment . . . they’ve begun to work it

out. And, perhaps you think you know, too. Yes, isn't it obvious? . . . Hadn't Jesus being trying to teach them all along . . . didn't they just see him transfigured up on the mountain . . . isn't that the clearest sign ever . . . yes, in a strange, paradoxical way, at the centre of everything . . . the one whole universe revolves around is . . .

No, it's not Jesus . . . it's a child. Yes, a child.

Jesus takes a child and puts the child in the centre of them all. A child! Now, we're not talking about our modern five year-old birthday party child. No, in those days children were almost non-entities . . . they were nobodies . . . they were only good for helping their mothers. So, the child Jesus puts in the centre represents anyone who is forgotten, marginalized, ignored, discounted, useless, hopeless, a nobody. They're the last person picked on the football team. They're the person who never gets invited to parties. They're the person who never gets visited in the nursing home. *That's* who *God's* world revolves around! And *God's* world is the only world we have. *God's* world is our world.

At the centre of the universe is a child. And anyone who welcomes such a child is the greatest.

It's a crazy idea. A ludicrously dangerous idea. I can't see it being accepted . . . can you?

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