

Sergeant Reynolds and Captain Reynolds

Solidarity and Servant Leadership

Malcolm Reynolds, like so many of the characters in *Firefly*, is a complex character who has been shaped by a long history of experiences that have made him who he is. One of his most endearing characteristics would have to be his unswerving loyalty to his crew. Perhaps this trait, like other facets of Mal's personality, can be traced to his time fighting against the alliance as a browncoat. As a sergeant responsible for those serving under his authority he is portrayed as a competent leader who cares deeply for those who have entrusted their lives to his leadership. Badger is onto something when he tells Mal that even though the war has ended he still sees a sergeant in him rather than a businessman. As Mal captains the serenity he brings with him the decisiveness and resoluteness of his sergeant days. But he also continues to use his position of power to ensure the safety of his entire crew, rather than pursuing his own personal interests.

After committing to take in Simon and River, the most venerable and forlorn characters in the story, he extends the same dedication to them as the rest of the crew. Despite the danger of their company, Mal refuses to take the easy option of turning them in. Instead he endangers his own life to serve them in the same way that he would for any of the others on his crew. One of the scenes in which Mal's devotion to Simon and River is most explicit is the confrontation between Jayne and Mal following Jayne's attempt to betray Simon and River into the (blue) hands of the Alliance. Jayne desperately tries to dissuade Mal from letting him be sucked out of the airlock by rationalising "It's not like I tried to turn you in Mal". Mal's solidarity with his crew is exemplified in his response: "But you did Jayne, if you do it to one of my crew you do it to *me*". It is not until Jayne exhibits some degree of the same solidarity (asking Mal not to tell the others about his betrayal) that Mal spares his life.

Although Mal's sense of duty is strongest towards his crew, it also extends well beyond his fellow journeyers aboard *Serenity*, especially to the weak and helpless who have been abandoned by the alliance. After the train heist he feels obliged to return the medicines needed by the miners, and when the prostitutes led by Mandy call for help he comes to their aid, to list just a few examples.

- Would you agree that Mal has been shaped by his history? Does he carry any negative baggage along with the strength of character he has formed?
- How have your experiences shaped you? How can you prevent your experiences from overwhelming you and changing you into someone you don't want to become, whilst still allowing them to strengthen your character?
- Why do Mal's qualities endear him to most viewers?
- Why are we attracted to characteristics which we are often not prepared to imitate?
- What price does Mal pay for his convictions?
- Read Matthew 25:31-46. Mal was not the first one to express his solidarity by taking the injustices perpetrated against others personally! What are the implications of Jesus' identification with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned?
- Who are the people who you see regularly who are the most venerable and victimised?
- Read Mark 10:35-45. What are the competing visions of greatness at work in this passage? How does Mal fit this vision of leadership? How doesn't he fit it?