

Jesus before the home crowd (Mark 6: 1-6)

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

6He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

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Commentary

Today's gospel passage, then, comes at a key point: the close of the initial "campaign" based around the Galilee and including a foray into Gentile territory. Having left the Galilee, Jesus returns to his home town. It's clearly the first time that he's gone back since he began his ministry. Now, in the synagogue, he's in front of the "home crowd". He teaches on the Sabbath and, as elsewhere, "many who heard him were astounded" (6:2). This is not an English World Cup performance: Jesus does not disappoint – he amazes! His teaching is as powerful as elsewhere. All the things they have heard about him are confirmed. His wisdom is astonishing. And that means that any initial scepticism they must have been feeling about the reports circulating so widely has to be revised.

But look at the reaction in vv 2-3: they're hardly positive! The reaction comes as accusation: "Where did he get all this? Where has he acquired this wisdom from so suddenly? And how on earth can he do these incredible things with his hands?" There's a wonderful irony, isn't there, in this last one. They know

Jesus as an artisan. He's "the carpenter"! His hands make things out of wood – they don't heal and deliver! The point is, they *know* him – or they *think* they do. That's why they rush to "place" him: he's the son of Mary, brother to James, Joses, Judas and Simon, and he's got sisters (who of course aren't important enough to be named!). In other words, they're saying, "Hey, this guy's not a mystery! He's not even particularly special!"

They move to *contain* Jesus – to control him. Calling him "the son of Mary" is a calculated insult. It reflects the question mark that clearly hung over Jesus' parentage. It resurrects all those old rumours: "That Jesus? Well, he's not *Joseph's* son, is he? Wonder who his father is?" Now of course, Mark is probably smiling to himself as he writes – *we* know who his father is, because Mark told us at the outset! But the main point here is that their astonishment is not awe, but outrage: "They took offence at him" (v3b). Jesus' pronouncement in v4 is not so much a rhetorical move to gain the advantage in an argument as it is a statement of his own realisation of what is happening in his ministry: the Good News will not be universally accepted. Jesus is marking his own rejection. His mission means that he will be rejected by his own hometown, his own kin, and his own family. It is part of the cost he has to bear, and in 10:28-30, will tell the disciples that following him is equally costly. It will take "leaving house, brothers, sisters, father, mother and fields for the sake of the Good News".

Miracles and "believing"

There is another point we should note here: Jesus is unable to perform any "deed of power" there. Except, that is, to lay hands (those hands again!) on a few sick people and heal them! I love that! Most of us would reckon that was pretty powerful, and that we were doing a mite better than average if we could lay hands on a few sick people and heal them! But that's because we generally manage to get the whole issue of miracles wrong. Mark isn't trying to tell us that Jesus was some sort of super-magician. We are like the Pharisees in 8:11-

12, who ask for a “sign”. “Show me a miracle that can be proven and we’ll believe!” is the idea behind our thinking. Yet Mark is absolutely clear here: miracles don’t “prove” anything! If you were around Jesus, miracles were clearly ten-a-penny – so much so that healing a few sick people is hardly worth a mention! The problem in Nazareth is that they do not “believe” (v6).

What would they not “believe”? That Jesus could *perform* miracles? Clearly not, because they’ve already admitted that all the reports of miraculous goings-on were obviously true! They didn’t “believe” in miracles were a sign. They didn’t believe in Jesus in the sense that they wouldn’t let him be the Son of God. That isn’t a doctrinal statement in this context! Mark is not suggesting that there are a set of doctrinal boxes to tick here in order to let Jesus’ power loose. He’s pointing us to their refusal to let Jesus be something other than what they’d *like* him to be – the hometown boy whom they knew, could explain and who represented neither a threat nor a challenge. They were offended at his strangeness – because it sounded like criticism and made them feel that they were being made fools of.

I remember the outrage among South African white Christians when blacks suggested that Jesus might actually be on the side of the poor and the oppressed in their struggle against Apartheid. This couldn’t possibly be! They *knew* Jesus! They had him tied up neatly in a box so that he couldn’t jump out and challenge them. Therefore the notion that the gospel could have something to say about freedom and justice could only be communist-inspired treason masquerading as theology. These good, God-fearing people who attended Church twice on Sundays shut themselves off from the liberative power of God and became part of that from which South Africa needed liberation. The point is that we who think we know Jesus best ought to be especially vigilant that we have not “cut him down to (our) size” and domesticated his message and power.

The good citizens of Nazareth did not “believe” in Jesus’ message of the kingdom. They were so busy taking offence that they were deafened to the Good News that Jesus proclaimed. The point is that they were *wilfully* deaf. They heard Jesus clearly (hence the astonishment), but heard all too clearly the way in which the Good News of the kingdom demanded change. A new community that was radically inclusive threatened the social order. It disturbed the class hierarchy in which everyone knew their place and could be “located” (as they immediately tried to do with Jesus). And they were having none of it!

Nazareth represents the opposition that Jesus has begun to provoke. At present, it is the exception rather than the rule. But the resistance is unmistakable, and will gather force as Mark’s narrative proceeds. Rejection will have the last, final say in the cross. The pericope begins with the crowds being astounded at Jesus’ teaching, and ends with Jesus being equally amazed at their unbelief.

Going deeper into the text (Mark 6: 1-5)

The scripture begins with Jesus’ return “to his own Country”. For the third time, he teaches in a synagogue on the Sabbath and for the third time he encounters opposition. This time, however, it is not from the authorities but from his neighbours and kinfolk. They are suspicious of this local boy’s notoriety, objecting that he has no distinguished lineage because of his domesticating constraints of nationality, kinship, and household expectations, the “prophet without honor” is unable to effect change there, and returns to his traveling mission.

I think most of us can relate to what Jesus must have experienced. Often when I return home, I feel that I regress to that 16 year old teenager, for some

reason it feels that the fact that I have gained experiences, knowledge and grown over the last decades evaporates and I become the rebellious, emotional teenager, the fourth sibling of my parents. I am sure that is not how people see me but that is how it often feels. I see it with my own children. For me they will be always little, although they are taller than me and knows about certain things far more that I could have known when I were their age. Often, as parents we think we can reason better, have more experience, are more educated than our children and therefore we have all the answers for their situation. Often I am humbled by my children's insight and wisdom and have to admit that they are right and that I have learnt from them.

I think we are often guilty of this opposition towards the 'voiceless' people in our churches too. We often tell the young people what they will enjoy doing and do not ask or listen to their opinion, because we have so much more knowledge and life experience.

Who are the 'voiceless' in your church and community?

Who are the people that get silenced, ignored or phase opposition in our church meetings? Maybe for the same reasons Jesus phased opposition: suspicious of this local boy's notoriety, objecting that he has no distinguished lineage because of his domesticating constraints of nationality, kinship, and household expectations

Maybe because they are not educated enough, wealthy, a women, a child, a foreigner, LGBT, has Special Needs or Mental Health problems?

Who are the 'prophets without honour' in your community and church?

All age worship ideas (Mark 6: 1-6)

Theme:

What if following Jesus means that those who love us or know us best reject us? It's a difficult one to answer.

The people in Jesus's home town were amazed by the things he said and the teaching he brought but they were soon overcome with ideas that he was speaking above his station. He was the local carpenter's son not the son of the synagogue ruler – who does he think he is?

Maybe that's the question to wrestle with - who does Jesus think he is? This story reminds us that up to this point he has lived an insignificant life in a town of little consequence, as Jane Austen might say. Yet now he not only takes on a very public ministry but seems to know a lot more and talks an awful lot more than a simple lad from Nazareth should!

Good historic and modern day examples of this are people like Olaudah Equiano – a freed slave who came to England and became a pioneer of the abolitionist movement http://abolition.e2bn.org/people_25.html

Or Rosa Parks, a champion of the Civil Rights Movement, who staged a one woman protest on a bus <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/rosa-parks>

Many people have to make sacrifices to become followers of Jesus – Rev Cham Kaur Mann, the first Asian woman in the UK to become a Baptist Minister, was raised in a Sikh family but when her life was transformed by Jesus she found she had to make a choice – her family or her new relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Many Christians worldwide find that being a Christian brings their life into danger or at the least to a place of rejection.

Today many people are displaced from their homes through violence.

Many people who are born and raised in Britain are being made to feel that this isn't their home. Just check the Twitter feed of Great British Bake Off winner Nadiya Hussein to see how bad the problem is.

How can the church buck the cultural trend to create a place of belonging, a place where people are made 'at home' no matter where they are from, what they believe or what colour their skin is?

How can the church be a place of celebration, affirmation and safety for those who sacrifice everything in order to take up their cross and follow Jesus?

Ideas:

Disney Clip – Lilo and Stich – Stich is an alien created to destroy. He escapes and lands on earth only to be mistaken for an ugly dog who is rescued by a dysfunctional family living by the model of Ohana – 'Ohana means family. Family means nobody gets left behind...or forgotten.'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1Q9b8d_O4U

Prayer – think of the things that make up a physical home – perhaps have cut outs ready to build up as people call out ideas. A door, windows, a roof etc...use these things to help focus on how we might pray.

Door – our welcome and hospitality to those who live here but feel they don't belong and for those who would like to live here but the door is shut.

Window – through a window we see the world in it's beauty and brokenness but the window also lets in light. Pray for the light of Jesus to shine in the

darkest places

Roof – we take for granted our security but what if it was taken away? Pray for those who need shelter, food, clothing and warmth – those who need to find a way out of poverty

Use your own prayers to expand and elaborate on the idea...

This is a great example of one church's response to radical hospitality – based in South Manchester it might not be something we can copy exactly but the ethos and ideas are there to challenge us.

<http://stjamesandemmanuel.org/home-cafe/>

Liturgies and hymns (Mark 6: 1-5)

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text. With apologies for the fact that you received them last week, as well!

The text for this Sunday is Mark 6 1-5 and that might lead us to reflect on Jesus commitment to the kingdom and what it cost him. Which of course may lead us in worship to reflect on our call to be disciples.

Some useful websites for worship material on the theme of mission and discipleship

<https://www.godtube.com/>

www.methodist.org.uk/ › Our faith › Worship › Methodist special Sundays

<https://joshuacentre.org.uk/>

This website for churches in Liverpool produces lots of resources for churches who don't always have the traditional hymn prayer sandwich and offers ideas that the worshipping congregations might use as café church activities or what they call stations. I have included some of their ideas but they website is well worth a visit.

Here is a reflection on the Lord's Prayer that could work as a prayer and or a meditation.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Reader 1: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not worshipped you and made your name holy, when we have been caught up in the desire to have more.

All: We pray that we may be open to hearing your voice and inspired to work for Economic justice.

All: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Reader 2: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not promoted the full Dignity of men and women.

All: We pray in hope that discrimination and prejudice will give way to welcoming all people to your banquet.

All: Give us this day our daily bread.

Reader 3: We ask forgiveness for the times we have not shared our resources with others.

All: We pray that we may be generous both with our possessions and our gifts and live lives of solidarity.

All: And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Reader 4: We ask forgiveness for the times we have not been in right relationship with others.

All: We pray that your spirit of reconciliation may be made real within us.

All: And lead us not into temptation.

Reader 5: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not believed that our Actions could make a difference.

All: We pray that we may work towards the common good, knowing that you are with us always.

A prayer that might work well as an opening prayer

God of our longing Hear our prayers,
Protect our dreams, and listen to our silent hopes.
Deal gently with our pain, Speak to our sadness
And remove the barriers that imprison our spirit.
Shed your light where shadows are cast,
That we may feel your warmth and know your presence.
Give us courage to hold fast to our vision
That we may build our world and create our future.
Amen.

(Annabel Shilson-Thomas, CAFOD)

A prayer that works well as a whole church confession

Lord whose kingdom includes everyone:

**Forgive us for the times we have discounted people who are not like us; Help us to mirror your welcome and love in our churches, schools and communities; and keep us in the knowledge that all people and places count in your eyes. In Jesus' name
Amen**

An action prayer that might work well in an all age service or in café church worship

Plait prayer

Cut three equal lengths of wool (approx 9 inches or 22 centimetres) in the colours of your choice. One colour represents yourself, one represents God and one represents other people. Knot them together at one end.

Encourage folk to reflect on their relationship with God and with others as they plait the wool. Knot the end when you finish and, as you do so, say a prayer commending yourself and those you have thought about, to God's love.

You could then invite folk to place them on the communion table or a cross as a hymn is sung.

Here are two activities to do in worship that might work well as an introduction to Lent

Activity 1

You will need

Printed smartphone outline (Search "smartphone outline" on google for images)

Pens/Felt Tips

Set up a table with pens/felt tips and some printed smartphone outlines. Print a copy of the following instructions:

When was the last time you checked your phone for a message? The last time you logged in to your emails?

The last time you logged in to Facebook or Twitter?

We spend a lot of time staying connected to other people. Emails, texts and social networking are great and can really help us to keep in touch with the people we love. But they can also be a drain on our time and on our relationships. They can also affect the amount of time we spend with God or interrupt it.

The bible tells us that Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. 40 days away from family, friends or any human contact.

How would 40 days with no phone signal feel to you?

How about an hour or two per day?

What could you do with the extra time?

What relationship could you work on?

What extra time could you spend praying or helping out someone who needs it?

Why not decide to give up your phone or computer for an hour or two each day over Lent?

Take one of the smartphone outlines and write down how long each day you plan to give up for AND what you plan to do with the time instead (hint: Don't spend it

watching television!).

Ask God to help you to use this time to draw closer to Him.

Again a hymn for reflection might work well

Activity 2

You will need

Gold/Silver Paper

Felt tip pens

Scissors

Glue

Craft materials (We have a box of assorted craft materials including stickers, various colours of card and paper, tissue paper, pipe cleaners etc. which we bought very cheaply)

Overview:

Today's talk challenged us to count the cost of following Jesus – to live in a way that reflects him even when it costs us something. This station creates an opportunity for people to take that on board and think about one practical step that they can take this week.

Tell everyone that you want people to make a coin (it's really helpful to have one prepared in advance). Explain that you want them to decorate and then write on the back one thing that they are going to do for God or for someone else this week that will cost them something.

It can be

- something that costs them time, for example: spending time with an elderly relative who doesn't get many visitors
- something that costs them their energy, for example: Offering to help someone with their gardening or decorating
- something that costs them money, for example being extra generous in some way.

Encourage them to keep their coin somewhere where they will see it regularly and it will remind them of their commitment for this week.

Shared with the kind permission of the Joshua centre.