

July 7, 2024
Mark 6: 1- 13

Those of you who were here last week will recall the gospel reading had 2 stories of faith embedded in each other. Jairus, with the dying daughter, and the hemorrhaging women, two desperate people who risk their all in one throw of the dice that Jesus may be the healer, and hence savior, they seek.

2 stories again today but not a Markan sandwich -more a pizza today or maybe a deconstructed sandwich.

Today in contrast, in Jesus' home town, Nazareth although not named in today's reading, among his own kin, we come across a story not of faith, but of rejection. Though Jesus has been given the guest preacher spot in the home synagogue and the initial reaction says the locals are blown away, astonished. This quickly turns to ... what is it? resentment, offence, outrage that the one so familiar, one they grew up with, is now making speaking with a presumed authority and making outrageous claims.

In Mark conflict is never far away. And here those closest to him. One of most common verses in scripture "the building block that was rejected has become the cornerstone".

Funny experience this going home business. Remember when I moved out of home for the first time. Did not move far just a suburb or two into the youth house with 4 of my mates from the local Ashburton Uniting house. And when I went home for the odd meal it did feel different. I could see my parents as people who had their foibles, like anyone, and that was OK. I even started calling them by their first names – Harold and Ivy; sort of radical thing we did in those days! But things were different. As has been said, "You can never go home - either home or you will have changed".

Talk in small groups about any experience of "coming home". What memories do you have of going home, maybe moved away for study, work, to get married. You can understand "home" in a wide sense - school reunion, attending a family funeral where see distant relations for first time for ages, looking at old photos,

Who knows how he was considered in the home town of Nazareth when he left. But when he came back talking like he was some sort of God anointed prophet, or even more.... Well.... That did not go over well. They are amazed, Jesus as stumbling block, a scandal.

Maybe that is part of why Jesus could do no mighty works - not in this environment of disdain and disbelief. It seems the rejection in today's reading is on the basis that the home town folk think Jesus is "one of ours", too familiar, and hence cannot be the Messiah, savior, healer, of his people. Home town preacher not appreciated but guest preacher can come and say the same thing and be celebrated.

Last week said faith is the hands, empty, upturned, ready to receive. Today no hands out, no faith, no miracles (except a few healings). In fact took offence to him.

Rather than withdraw to call down damnation upon their heads, rather than withdraw to sulk or lick his wounds the response of Jesus is to go in the opposite direction. To intentionally expand and intensify his mission.

Jesus once again calls to himself those he has already called to be found in his company - his disciples, but this time the calling is in order to send them out. And in this there is a major principle of discipleship for the church. The called person will inevitably become the sent person. There is no being "called into" the presence of Jesus that will not one day, when the Lord's timing be right, (which it goes without saying may not at all be your timing) becomes also the "sent from" Jesus. No longer just "Come to me", now it also includes, "Go from me, go with my authority over evil spirits, authority to heal, proclaim the breaking in of the reign of God, into our world, our lives. The initial call included the words to leave all behind and the instruction to go also included words about not taking anything (much) with you. It seems the call to discipleship is not an upwardly mobile summons. Jesus divides his team up into 6 pairs, as we still today see Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses out and about in our streets. And they are sent out to travel around the local villages. Interesting that Jesus does not send out individuals - only in pairs. Why?

This is travel with a mission, with a purpose. In this sense it becomes a metaphor, an image, of the Christian life. Travel in Jesus company is not a holiday, not mere personal development, or sight seeing. It will involve the challenging, the confronting, just as it will involve the elation of the making present the power of the Kingdom.

Second, take with you only what need for travel – sandals and stick. You cannot take is what normally would be thought of as those things essential for survival - food, money and bag to put the otherwise missing food and money in. That is considered excess baggage because the disciple will be dependent upon hospitality once they arrive at their destination. It's as if the authority of Jesus and the excess baggage seem to be mutually exclusive. We could have a whole sermon another day on excess baggage - sufficient for today simply to note it can be internal or external, it can be individual or collective. by internal excess baggage I mean stuff like unresolved guilt, chronic low self esteem, our various addictions, preoccupations with status and things, seething resentment and anger ready to erupt at the smallest perceived slight. Usually those are more individually manifest characteristics, though you could certainly argue that those things can also be manifested by a group, or organisation. And add to the list, filling your life so full you can barely stuff another electronic gadget into it. External external baggage... well one of the obvious ones that impacts upon the life of the church is property. Taken as a whole the Christian church in the Western world is a massive property owner. We in the UCA share in that.

Can be a great resource as we make community space available, but can be a weighty “burden?” To maintain. We are working through that at Church Council at present. Whatever conclusion an individual or a church comes to, and it will vary from situation to situation but what we must avoid is any sense that our identity as Christians or church is tied to this object or thing. Surely nothing more projects an image of unbelief in our own identity and words and allegiances and misses the point of the urgency contained in this reading. I mean, why bother praying for something you need, when you can buy it?

We do not have to see today's reading as the literal guidelines for the mission of the church. It was a specific, short term, localized missionary journey. Jesus was not setting down the blueprint for the life of the church in 2,000years time. But in releasing ourselves from that, the threat to us becomes that we also lose the sense of urgency. How to keep alive the passion?