

The Missionary King Mk 6:1-29

Tim Anderson 31/3/2019

We live in an increasingly polarised world.
These days the provision of news services
has become encased on political silos.
So if you have one kind of opinion you read these news services.
If you have another kind of opinion,
you read these kind of news services.
And the perspectives are diverging.
They are becoming less similar.
What does that mean for our world?
It means people are finding it harder than ever
to get on with one another.
We've almost lost the ability to converse with people we disagree with.

We've seen over the last couple of weeks looking at stories from Mark,
that people were having the same experience with Jesus.
Some people were finding him very threatening.
They even started talking to their friends about how to have him killed.
Other people found his teaching and his actions wonderful.
They were convinced he was sent from God.
Opinions about Jesus were becoming increasingly polarised.
Some people loved him.
Other people hated him.

This might be something you experience yourself.
When you follow Jesus,
not everyone is going to like it.
Some will be positive about it.
Others might decide that you've been swept up in a cult.
Jesus polarises people.
And we need to work out how to deal with that.

In Mark 6-8,

Jesus is training his disciples how to live in that kind of a world.
He's training them how to follow him in a polarised world.

In today's passage we have three mini stories.

Verses 1-6) People try to domesticate Jesus

Verses 7-13) Jesus delegates his ministry

Verses 14-29) People dread Jesus - they live in fear of him.

So our first story,

People try to domesticate Jesus.

Jesus is in his home town, Nazareth.

He does what Rabbis do.

He teaches in the synagogue.

And many who heard him were amazed.

People hadn't heard teaching like this before.

Jesus was helping them to know and understand God

in a way that they hadn't been able to before.

And it wasn't just the things he taught.

The miracles he performed blew them away.

That was one side of the polarisation.

But then there was the other side of the coin.

Someone said,

"Hold on a second.

My younger sister sat next to him in Mrs Smith's grade 3 class.

He was just a normal kid like any other kid."

And someone else said,

"He's just the local carpenter.

He's an ordinary bloke like me.

Just a tradie.

Do you think he might be getting a bit big for his boots?"

And someone else said,

"I've heard that there was some irregularity about his birth you know.

Mary and Joseph weren't actually married when Mary got pregnant.

Do you think he might be doing this impressive teaching

as a way of trying to cover up the shame of his birth?"

If you want to give it a label,
it was small town tall poppy syndrome.
People who were initially amazed at his teaching
became resentful of him.
Their proud hearts wouldn't let them admit
that someone they grew up with
might be more special than them.
He was just someone from a local quite large family.
I mean there was Jesus and four brothers:
James, Joseph, Judas and Simon;
and at least two sisters.
So seven children at least.
And one of them were just getting a bit full of himself.

Well Jesus responded to that in verse 4.
He said,
"A prophet is not without honour except in his own town,
among his relatives and in his own home."
Or in a phrase we might use,
"Familiarity breeds contempt."
These people thought they knew Jesus,
so they thought they didn't have anything to learn from Jesus.
What a terrible mistake!
A mistake with eternal consequences.

Lots of people today think they know what Jesus has to offer.
They've seen quaint little church buildings dotted around.
They might have met some Christian people.
And they think that Jesus makes them a bit happier or something.
And they think they are pretty happy with their life already,
so they don't need Jesus.
What a terrible mistake!
A mistake with eternal consequences.

What will Jesus do when the people from his home town write him off?

Some people would be discouraged,
and they might give up.
But Jesus is not deflected from his ministry at all.
Instead he continues on his path,
teaching from village to village,
and even taking it the next step.
He sends his disciples out on mission as well.
When Jesus first chose his disciples,
he said to the fishermen,
"I will make you fishers of men."
Now here's their opportunity.
He sent them out in pairs.
Why in pairs?
Because they were going out not to preach themselves
but to bear witness to Jesus.
And you need the evidence of more than one witness
for the testimony to be compelling.
He sent them out without resources.
No money, no food, not even a change of clothes.
Why did he do that?
Well it's about accepting that they are vulnerable and weak.
It's about recognising that they depend on God for everything.
If you are going out with a message
about how people need to put their trust in Jesus,
then you need to show by your actions that your trust is in Jesus.
Jesus told them that when they go to a village,
they should stay in the first place that offers them accommodation.
And not move from that house
until they leave that village.
Why did he do that?
Well you could come to a village,
and someone might offer you a room for the two of you to share.
And then next week,
someone else might offer you a place to stay where there's a room each.
So you say thanks to the first guy,

and take up accommodation there.

And the next week,
someone might offer for you to stay where there's a room each
and a lap pool to cool off after a hard day
and a spa to relax in.

So you say thanks to the second guy and move in there.

And what are the people in the village going to see?

Here's a religious teacher who is in it for his own gain.

Does he really believe this stuff he's preaching?

Or is it a vehicle to a comfortable life?

And here's another question,

when your work in that village is done,

how keen are you going to be to move to the next village?

Will the ease and comfort take away your zeal for the ministry?

So Jesus is instructing his disciples to a life of contentment.

Stay in the first house.

Be contented with that.

Jesus' last command is to train his disciples to expect rejection.

6:11

"If any place will not welcome you or listen to you,

leave that place and shake the dust off your feet

as a testimony against them."

In another place,

Jesus tells his disciples that we are not greater than our master.

Anyone here greater than Jesus?

I thought not.

So if they rejected him,

they will reject us.

Not everyone.

Not all the time.

But we are going to experience it more often than is comfortable.

So we need to expect it and be ready for it.

To be honest,

I think this is one of the great challenges

for the church in Australia today.

Our nation is becoming increasingly willing to reject us out of hand.

We haven't been used to that.

We need to understand that what we are experiencing is a return to situation normal.

There is a temptation in many sections of the church to preach a 'Jesus has come to make your life wonderful, so that you have all your physical desires and emotional needs met' gospel.

Well you aren't going to get rejected with that kind of a message. But neither is it the gospel that saves.

If you are preaching a message that includes God's judgement on the unrepentant that includes the need to live with Jesus as your Lord where the primary benefit of the gospel is sins forgiven and a relationship with God restored, then you will face rejection.

And when that happens you don't curl up in a ball and wonder what's gone wrong, you shake the dust off your feet and move on.

So what did the disciples do?

6:12

"They went out and preached that people should repent.

They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."

We can be encouraged that God does mighty things through his people.

And so we can preach with authority.

We might not look like the biggest show in town.

The Westernport festival might have a far larger budget.

The football club might have many more members.

But the church is where people can receive eternal life.

This matters.

So we speak with authority.

The people in Jesus' home town have tried to domesticate God.

They can't see the power of God in Jesus.
But Jesus presses on with his mission,
delegating the work to the twelve
and training them for the task of ministry.
And finally the news of this penetrates to King Herod.
And we get a long excursus
about what had caused Herod to have a guilty conscience.
The news fills Herod with dread
because he knows that he stands under God's judgement.
What was going on
was that people were trying to account for Jesus' powerful ministry.
And they were coming up with their own explanations for it.
Some of them were pretty creative explanations,
but you get that.
People with limited access to the facts often want to venture an opinion.
And so some were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected.
Well it's fanciful.
I mean John baptised Jesus.
How could Jesus possibly be John resurrected?
But obviously not everyone was at his baptism.
Some said Jesus is Elijah.
Now they didn't mean the actual prophet Elijah
who had ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot 800 years previously.
Rather they meant the prophecy in Malachi of a new Elijah.
Maybe Jesus was that new Elijah.
In another place Jesus said,
no that's not me,
that was John the Baptist,
he pointed to me.
But Herod settles on the explanation of John being resurrected in Jesus.
Why?
Because when people have done the wrong thing,
they often interpret events as God pursuing them,
finding them out.
Their guilty consciences colour their outlook on the world.

But Mark doesn't just tell us about Herod's conclusion that Jesus was in fact John resurrected, he also fills in the back story. And so what is it telling us? Well first of all, it's giving us a picture of what will happen to Jesus later on. There is a weak public official. He's tasked with upholding justice but he wants an easy life. So he caves in to pressure to get rid of an innocent man. That description applies equally well to Herod and Pontius Pilate. The second thing we see in this story, is how people hate God because they don't want their sexual immorality disapproved of. Herodias was Philip's niece. And the two were married. That's a bit strange and probably wrong. But then Herodias met Herod while they were both in Rome. And Herod convinced her to leave Phillip and enter into a relationship with him instead. Which she agreed to do with the proviso that Herod would divorce his wife and actually marry her. She wasn't interested in being a floozy on the side. Well John had been telling Herod that what he was doing was wrong. And Herodias hated John for saying that. She hated him so much, that when the daughter from her first marriage came in, and aroused the half drunk dinner guests so much with her dancing that Herod would give her basically anything she asked for, what did she want? The head of John the Baptist. You would have to be absolutely consumed by hatred if you were offered anything up to half a kingdom, and the best you could think of was to cut off the head that warned you of your spiritual peril.

Well that's a picture of today, isn't it?
People inflamed with hatred
because their sexual immorality is disapproved of.
It's a signature of our times.
It's like people want to claim that no one is allowed to have an opinion
about what they do sexually.
It's up to them and whoever they do it with,
and no one else has any right to comment.
It's OK to comment about what tea bags someone uses,
because they might not be fair trade.
It's OK to comment about what car someone drives,
because they might be exacerbating the greenhouse effect.
It's OK to comment about what clothes someone wears,
because they might be supporting a sweat shop in Bangladesh,
instead of sensibly supporting recycling
through an Op Shop in Hastings.
But the outrage
that someone could comment on issues of public morality.
And let's face it,
it is public morality.
Because behaviour that destroys families makes for a broken society.
And we all have to live in that society.
Today's brave new world is not so new.
Herodias got there well before us.

What else does the story about Herod teach us?
That there are people who would listen to the truth,
if they didn't have someone else shouting in their ear.
Herod liked to listen to John.
But his wife was doing her level best
to make sure he didn't get convinced by John.
Metaphorically, she was shouting in Herod's ear.
And this is something we see today as well.
There is after all nothing new under the sun.
There are people who would be willing to listen to Jesus.

They would be willing to listen to us tell them about Jesus.

But someone is shouting in their ear.

Maybe it is their partner.

"Don't start following Jesus,
you'll disturb our settled relationship."

or "I can't cope with the thought
of you having a loyalty to something that I don't share."

Maybe it's their parents.

"Don't start following Jesus,
I'd hate my kids to show me up spiritually."

Or maybe it's their friends.

"Don't start following Jesus,
We might not be able to do all the fun things we do together
if you follow him.

And my other friends might think I'm not cool
if I hang around with you."

It's a somewhat depressing picture, isn't it?

Some people domesticate the gospel.

They think they know what Christianity has to offer.

It's like a familiar, old piece of clothing that you don't wear any more.

Some people are inflamed with hatred against Jesus,
because he has the temerity to comment about morality.

Some people have another person shouting in their ear,
and they can't hear the message of Jesus properly.

But that's the situation

that Jesus sends his disciples out to preach the gospel into.

It's not an easy task.

Sometimes you are going to need to shake the dust from off your feet.

But if you are able to trust God,
not just say you trust him but actually put it into practice.

And preach the gospel of repentance and faith with authority,
then by the power of God,

he will draw people to faith.