

8 July
Mark 6.1-13

This week I spoke at U3A on Tuesday morning. I spoke on my experience of being a woman priest. Among other things, I said: “The call to priesthood for me is the call to life, to freedom, to love, to sharing the intimacy of relationships with God and with others. It is also about embodiment, about being a God person and imaging the divine in my humanity.”

I am sure some are shocked by the way I do ‘being a woman priest’, some are encouraged, some may even be outraged..People I grew up with might wonder..

On Thursday, nine of us prayed and reflected with art at the Gallery. It was a surprising and moving time, the first time I’ve done anything like it in Sale.. new beginnings..

Our gospel today is a very rich passage. It too forms a new beginning, after the three episodes which symbolise Jesus’ power to change the world (stilling the storm, 4:35-41; the exorcism, 5:1-20; and the healing of the two women, 5:21-43). And earlier chapters, where we heard the responses of Jesus’ family, thinking he was mad, and the Jerusalem scribes, who declared that he was empowered by Beelzebul (another way of saying he was mad). Today, chapter 6:1-6 is returning us to the theme of Jesus’ family. They have already been portrayed as failing to understand Jesus. The passage rather pointedly emphasises again that they, along with the rest of his kin and the synagogue gathering, do not accept him (see especially 6:4).¹

Loader reflects:

Certainly Mark’s gospel is telling us something about Jesus which was also part of his instruction to others: there is a higher priority than family power and obligation. Family power, meant to empower one to independent adulthood, frequently aborts the process, and becomes a source of oppression. There are many people who can identify with the experience of being reduced to ‘junior’, someone’s

¹ Loader: <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkPentecost6.html>

child and therefore no one in particular, whether by family systems or extended family or local communities and whether in outward reality or in the inward reality of the mind and memory. Some people's salvation, liberation, therapy needs to consist in being set free from such shackles...² Talk to me if you've had such experience like Jesus.

People's disbelief stopped Jesus in his tracks, it disempowered him, which -- when you think about his ability to raise a dead girl to life with a single word or that all the woman who had been bleeding for so long had to do was touch the fringe of his cloak to be healed -- is really pretty astounding³. Isn't God all powerful? Maybe our response too limits even God? This is a challenge for me..

David Lose reflects:

What if Mark is inviting us to contemplate the possibility ..that we have an important role to play in the manifestation of God. To say it another way: this isn't about salvation, it's about the role each one of us is invited to play in sensing, experiencing, and making known God's will and work in the world...

Consider for a moment, in what ways are you encouraging or inhibiting God's work in your life, household, community, and the world.

- Let's take a few moments in silent prayer to contemplate those places we feel we may be resisting God's activity in our lives.

- Is there some area -- some regret we can't get over, some grudge we can't let go, some hurt that has come to define us, some addiction that imprisons us, some anger that has taken hold of us -- that we are having difficulty entrusting to God?

- Similarly, is there some opportunity we feel God might be inviting us to or some challenge God may be setting for us that we find difficult to embrace or entertain.

Notice, these questions aren't about the quality of our salvation; rather, they are about the character of our Christian life. And if we ponder them -- noticing that just as in this Bible story it matters how the people receive Jesus -- we might just be surprised at the

² <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkPentecost6.html>

³ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1620>

conclusions we reach, the things we let go, and the great deeds we dare.

What you do matters and makes a difference.⁴

So what does Jesus do when he is rejected by his own hometown? He goes elsewhere, healing and preaching. He gets on with the job, commissioning his disciples to share the task. He tells them to travel light and where they are not welcome and people don't want to hear, to leave and 'to shake off the dust that is on their feet as a testimony against them'. So are there limits to his inclusiveness? Or is it simply that he is unable to bless, liberate and heal, if we are not open to the possibility? Or that time is short and there's much to be done.. move on!

I don't think it's coincidence that this story of division and rejection sits just before the mission of the twelve. If the disciples were sitting in the synagogue that day they would have seen and heard it all, and witnessed the kind of reception they may encounter as they are sent into the local villages – be prepared to be rejected seems an underlying theme.

Loader says:

Mark sets up a lifestyle for those who follow Jesus, calling them to live as Jesus lived – simply, as bearers of good news to the poor, bringers of healing, and agents of liberation; a lifestyle that was, and continues to be, at odds with the values of a society that admires power and wealth, and overlooks the poor.

Their lifestyle was also a statement in itself. It challenged the sedentary bases of power founded on land and family/kin. Jesus promoted a radically alternative set of values. The social dislocation which he challenged some to take upon themselves was a social and a political statement, because it called into question the dominant values of society which kept the poor poor. Whether among the travellers or among those who stayed in their community, Jesus called people to be and bear good news for the least. No wonder the established power structures of family and land and religion saw only madness and did their best to tame him

⁴ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1620>

and his followers. The judgement of history is probably that they have at least succeeded with most of his followers to this day.⁵

The example of today's reading encourages us to brush away the dust of preconceptions, to step into the future clear-sighted, without resentment and free of the things that limit and discourage.⁶

Let's finish with the prayer that is in your bulletin, then a time of silent reflection:

Loving God,
Your church is composed of people like me.
I help make it what it is.
It will be friendly, if I am.
Its pews will be filled, if I help fill them.
It will do great work, if I work.
It will make generous gifts to many causes, if I am a generous giver.
It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship, if I invite and bring them.
It will be a church where people grow in faith and serve you, if I am open to such growth and service.
Therefore, with your help Lord, we shall dedicate ourselves to the task of being all the things you want your church to be. Amen⁷

Susanna

⁵ <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkPentecost6.html>

⁶ seasononline.org.au

⁷ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1620>