



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading Mark 6:1-13.

Sermon: 5 July 2009

The text for the sermon: ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph,^a Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" ¹

There are a few things that we need to explain in our reading this morning. In Jesus' time it was all about honour and shame in a culture of challenge and riposte. You could have ascribed honour by means of birth, adoption or by one's achievement by means of benefaction, military success, and the winning of an argument in public. Honour resided also in some specific **public roles, statuses, and offices such as a father in a household and a king**. Shame on the other hand meant the loss of honour. You could have ascribed shame by means of a legal sentence by a court of law or by the verdict of a king. You could also achieve shame by cowardice and failure to respond to a challenge. One may refuse to participate in the honor-gaining games characteristic of males, and thus bring contempt on oneself.

If you could win an argument or convince other people of your opinion through your words and appearance, you had honour and status. When you had honour and status you would do everything in your power to keep it. If you lose it, you were considered shameful and without any honour. You could lose your honour by losing an argument in public or by associating yourself by means of social interaction with shameful people or by your loss of an specific office in society.

In our reading Jesus was not suspected to have any honour at all. His genealogy was full of shameful people like a prostitute Rahab, and an adulteress Bathsheba. But Jesus surprises all the people closest to him. He acts like someone who has honour and status by his appearance in the synagogue. He is acting in such a way that they are speechless and without any words, as if they are the shameful. This becomes clear in their reaction. In those days you would react to the challenge by insulting the other person. If you could get the other person to retreat or be emotionally upset you would be considered the winner of achieved honour. In this case they say: Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary? In Greek the word for carpenter denotes someone who worked with their hands and not necessarily someone who worked with wood. We can also translate it with a "craftsman". Even more importantly they refer to Jesus as the "son of Mary" and not Joseph, as if they are actually calling him the illegitimate son or the fatherless boy. In those days a boys name depended on the good name of his father. **Sons enjoy the honor of their father's name and membership in his clan. Hence, they are regularly identified as "the son of so-and-so**. Your father's name would give you honour, status, and security. If you did not have a father you were (a) nobody. You did not matter at all and people would not take you seriously.

^a Greek *Joses*, a variant of *Joseph*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Mk 6:3

But Jesus knew something that the people in his hometown did not know. He had a father in heaven that sent him to earth with a mission. He had to reveal God and his love to humankind. Jesus did not lose track or focus of his real mission. He prophetically reacted to their hostile and shameful behaviour by saying: “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”²

And then Mark tells us in a very nonchalant way that Jesus did not perform miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith. It seems as if Mark is actually saying: not even miracles could convince them of Jesus’ true identity and purpose!

Jesus stayed focus and commanded his disciples to go out in pairs of two and be witnesses of his Name. In those days it was always required to have two witnesses in any case of the law. According to them two witnesses confessing the same facts cannot lie! He commanded them to go with only the bare necessities to each and every village. They had to find a home where they were welcomed. If they were welcomed, they had to stay there until it was time to move to another village. He gave them authority over the “cultic impure spirits”. In those days it was believed that sickness was caused by evil spirits. If you were sick you were considered as unclean and unable to enter the temple.

Jesus commanded them to help all the people into a relationship with God by healing them. They also had to preach to the people to repent in order for them to enter into a living relationship with God.

And if they were not welcomed then they had to do what every Jew in those days would do when they came back from a journey to a foreign land before entering into the holy Land. They had to wipe the dust of their feet – the dust that made them unclean for being in an unclean country among the Gentiles. They had to make a public statement that they were not part of those who was not willing to listen to them.

What is the message for us today?

I think we as Christians can be so easily be convinced by the insults of others to back away from being witnesses of Jesus’ true identity and mission. We can be so easily put off by the hatred and hostility of our world. We often loose sight and focus of who Jesus really is to us and what our responsibilities are as people who has faith.

We forget that we belong to our Father in heaven and that what people are actually saying to us must not matter at all. We must not loose track of our true mission as Christian witnesses in this world.

We do not have to be rich to be a witness of Christ glory. We do not have to be clever or articulate to confess to our world that Jesus is the only Saviour of humanity. We do not require any extra clothing to bear witness to Jesus’ presence in everyday living. We do not have to be gifted to confess that Jesus came to save the faithful from death, hell and sin. We do not have to be healthy to help others who are sick and in need of God’s loving care. We do not need money to convince others that we belong to Christ.

² *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Mk 6:4

No Jesus says to us too: Just go as you are? Why? We have to be dependant from God our Father. He will help and provide us with the necessities that we require. God will - through his Holy Spirit – guide us to be witnesses of his glorious Name. We must trust him to know that He will equip us with everything we need to be witnesses of Christ's mercy and love...

We must not allow our world to dictate to us what we must say with regard to our Christian faith. It is God who calls us to go out and spread the good news. May we never stop being witnesses despite the hostility of our world, our village and the people around us?

Scott and Dominique you have an enormous responsibility. You must live your lives in such a way that Lilly will be a witness too of God's love, mercy and grace. You must conduct your following of Christ in such a way that she follows your example as soon as she is willing and able. You must love God so much that she would feel and experience it in the small and larger things that happen in your home. May you always pray with her and share with her the joys of a faithful following of God.

Amen

Readings for the week

Mark 6.1-13

In Chapter 5 it seemed that nothing or no one could resist Jesus ministry. However, in Nazareth it was a different story. Everyone knew Jesus and his family. He was a local craftsman. He was supposed to be just like them so even when they heard him speak (v. 2) and saw him healing (v.5), people could not shake off their preconceptions. Was he getting above his station in life? Had he, by going away, failed in his duty to his mother? Whatever the reason, it was the attitude of local people that meant that Jesus could 'do no deed of power' (v. 5), This contrasts with the mission of the Twelve where their preaching and healing meet with success (vv. 6b-13). This mission was not just something that Jesus sent the Twelve out to do, it was an embodiment of his own authority and mission. The ground rules for the conduct of the mission emphasise the urgency of Jesus' ministry. The logistics were minimal: they were to depend on local hospitality.

Other readings: Ezekiel 2:1-5; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10.