

They've Made Up Their Minds

Mark 6:1-6a

Introduction - Seeing What You Expect to See

I'd like to start with a question, a riddle if you like (If you've heard this before allow others to have a few chances first). A father and a son are going for a drive together. As they drive along there is a terrible accident and the father is killed instantly and the son is taken to hospital. As he is wheeled into theatre the surgeon looks down and says, "I can not operate on this child. He is my son." How is this possible?

[take answers]

The surgeon is the child's mother. The vast majority of people struggle to consider that the surgeon is the mum because we have an expectation that surgeons are men. This is not just when we're thinking of things in our minds, sometimes something can be right in front of us and we fail to see it because of our pre-conceived ideas. We even have the expression in English, "You can't see the wood for the trees."

This morning as we look at this little section at the start of Mark 6, we see that Jesus was confronted with this problem as well.

They Saw Jesus' Power (vv. 1-2)

Perhaps as a breather between ministry journeys Jesus returns home to Nazareth and brings his disciples with him. These little notes about Jesus returning home help us to see the reality of Jesus' time here on earth. Maybe he's gone home to show that he was taking care of himself, perhaps he wanted to make sure that Mary was ok, maybe he wanted to show new disciples where he grew up. The lack of embellishment indicates to us that we're reading a genuine account, not a story for the sake of answering all our questions. What we are told is that, as appears common, Jesus teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

What's interesting to note here is that the people in the synagogue recognise the uniqueness of what they're hearing and seeing, "When the Sabbath came, [Jesus] began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. 'Where did this man get these things?' they asked. 'What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?'"

The Nazarene listeners recognise that Jesus is speaking with amazing wisdom and they're either seeing miracles happen right then or they're hearing reports of miracles which they accept to be true.

This is a good start. We don't have people running away from Jesus or refusing to hear him. These people hear Jesus and even recognise that there is power at work in both word and action.

They'd Already Made A Decision (vv. 3-4)

However, what conclusion to the Nazarene's draw as to who Jesus is and what these demonstrations of wisdom and power means? We read in verses 3, "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him."

To say that the listeners took offence at Jesus is literally, "they stumbled at Jesus." What was the cause of their stumbling? They already knew who Jesus was. Jesus was a local carpenter. You'd receive the wisdom from a carpenter about building a house or furniture but where does all this knowledge of God come from? Despite acknowledging the wisdom of what Jesus had to say, they don't want to hear it from a carpenter.

The local people also seem to insult Jesus as to his parents. Jesus is described as "Mary's son" rather than "the son of Joseph." Even if Joseph was dead (as it appears), it is still unusual not to refer to someone according to their father and this would normally be done as an insult. It's likely that the story of Mary's pregnancy was known and while some may have heard that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit most would have simply considered Jesus an illegitimate child. We can't be certain

but maybe they were saying, “Yes, this man may talk about God as a heavenly Father, well he might need a better father but I’m fine with my proper heritage!”

Finally the Nazarene listeners list his brothers, “James, Joseph, Judas and Simon” and mention that they know his sisters too. “Jesus is just one of us. His family is still here. So, he can do some special things since he went away, I bet that makes him think that he’s better than us now.”

The crowd had heard his wisdom in teaching and seen his power in miracles but there was a stubborn refusal to consider what was unique about Jesus to understand why this wisdom and power was at work.

How does Jesus respond to this reception from his home town? Jesus uses a variation on a common saying, “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.’” In English we have the saying, “You can’t go home again” but the meaning is different, The English expression “you can’t go home again” means ‘you can’t recover the past.’ In contrast, the expression which Jesus uses is almost to say that people won’t let you move beyond who you were as a child. People weren’t willing to evaluate Jesus on who he is but only on their memory of Jesus growing up and knowledge of who his family is. Jesus does not receive the honour that was due to him as a prophet (and, as Mark has already indicated to his readers, as more than a prophet).

Now, there can be something of an application for us in this in allowing people to be considered as they currently are, not constantly reminding people what they used to be like or always sharing stories from the past. One of my nephews can perhaps best be described as an exuberant child and the boy’s parents say to me, “You give us hope.” The amount of times when they have commented to me, “We saw him to doing this and then we remembered ... uncle Duncan used to do the same thing. Maybe he’ll change like Duncan did.” While there is the regular reminders of what a difficult child I was, at least there’s also an acknowledgement about the change which God has brought in my life.

However, while we can find a connection with ourselves and others wanting to be received for who we are today, the real focus here is on Jesus and the inability of the people of his home town to recognise where his power came from and who he truly was. The application for us then is that we need to continue to be open to learning who Jesus truly is. When we open the Gospels and read about Jesus are we only going to pay attention to the stories of Jesus which we like (some of his parables, his welcoming of people and expressing forgiveness, putting those know-it-all teachers of the law in their place, etc.) but ignore or reject those stories which make us uncomfortable (his uncompromising call to follow him, his challenging teaching about money, his comments that we can't save ourselves, etc.)? Though we didn't have Jesus hanging out in the Lockyer Valley when he was growing up, we are at risk of being like the people of Nazareth in this story if we expect Jesus to fit into the box we've assigned to him.

Faith Is Essential In The Kingdom (vv. 5-6a)

Other than continuing to be open to seeing Jesus as he is, is there a way of avoiding doing the same thing as the people of Nazareth? The problem and by extensions its solution is seen in verses 5 and 6, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith."

The real problem here is that the people of Nazareth had faith in themselves and in their ability to determine who Jesus truly was or wasn't. The solution to this problem is that they needed to have faith in Jesus. They had heard Jesus' wisdom and had seen evidence of miracles but refused to be moved to put their trust in Jesus. It appears that the only people who were willing to put their trust in Jesus was a few sick people who perhaps were desperate enough to acknowledge their need.

In the past the church has sometimes blamed people for not experiencing healing on the basis that they lacked faith. Such teaching is unhelpful as this story can not be compared to our exact situation. In this story Jesus, the bringer of the

kingdom of God, is present and he heals people and performs other miracles to both authenticate who he is as well as demonstrate characteristics of the kingdom of God. Today we no longer have Jesus physically present and so while miracles still occur miracles no longer serve to authenticate Jesus and his message. We still ask for miracles on the grounds of God's grace and care for his children but we surrender ourselves to God's sovereignty in his answering too.

While blaming people as having a lack of faith may have been characteristic in the past, we perhaps have swung to an opposite emphasis in the church today and declare or imply that faith has no impact on God's work in our lives. This little story declares that Jesus can be amazed at people's lack of faith and that lack of faith hindered his ministry.

We do indeed need to trust in Jesus more and more. As defined last week, we need to have faith which is a serious and public, personal continuing commitment to Jesus. This faith will help us to connect with what God wants to do in our lives while also accepting if we don't experience miracles which we may ask for.

Conclusion

We're going to come to a time of confession now. Let's take this time to say sorry to Jesus for determining for ourselves what parts of his life and teaching we're willing to listen and submit to. Let us also repent of the times when we have trusted in ourselves or in others rather than have had faith in Jesus.

[pray to close]