

**Trinity Baptist Church**  
**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Andy Banks**  
**Mark 6:1-6a; Jesus' Authority Questioned**

The children's material is again following a different theme to my sermon this week, so feel free to tune in to that at home, or quietly talk through it with your children here, instead of listening to me. I'd like to begin with a song by Keith Green, called *Song For My Parents*.

**[Play Keith Green, *Song For My Parents*]**

We're returning to our series in Mark's Gospel, asking ourselves the question Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" That question, and the follow up question, "What difference does who he is make to your life today" are prominent in our passage today, from Mark 6:1-6a.

**[Read Mark 6:1-6a]**

*1Jesus left there and went to his home town, accompanied by his disciples. 2When the Sabbath came, he 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? 3Isn'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.*

*4Jesus said to them, 'Only in their own towns, among their relatives and in their own homes are prophets without honour.' 5He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them. 6He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

**[Pray]**

"Only in their own towns, among their relatives and in their own homes are prophets without honour." It is probably true that the hardest place to witness for Christ is in your own home. Part of the problem is that those we live with see the worst of us as well as the best of us, and that can negatively impact upon their view of Jesus. That's one of the themes that Keith Green explored in the song we heard. It can also be true that those closest to us feel most threatened by our faith, especially if that faith is new. I remember hearing one of the speakers at Spring Harvest years ago talking of how her husband thought she was having an affair when she first came to faith in Jesus because of the radical change in her life.

So, think how it must have been for *Jesus'* relatives and those who knew him as a boy, when they heard about and encountered his miraculous power and authoritative teaching! Even if they just saw him, as many did, as a prophet ... that alone would be a lot to take in! "Prophets don't grow up from little boys, do they?" We don't expect them to come from within our midst! But Jesus wasn't merely claiming to be a *prophet*. The things he was claiming for himself – that with his coming the Kingdom of God had come near (1:15), that he had the authority to forgive sins (2:10), that he was Lord of the Sabbath (2:28) – these things were tantamount to a claim to be both the long-awaited Messiah and God himself. And that claim was supported by his miraculous command over the violent forces of nature, sickness, demon possession, and even death. This was a lot to swallow for those who had known him from childhood.

It's hard to determine the tone of the first three recorded questions that they asked themselves when they heard his teaching. Some see them as sneering remarks born out of the offence that they took at him (v.3), while others see them as open questions resulting from their amazement at his teaching (v.2): "Where did this man get these things? What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?" There certainly is a recognition that both his teaching and his miracles are extraordinary! But, even if they started out with open, inquiring minds, seeking to understand what they were witnessing, they didn't stay that way for long. Rather, they quickly closed their minds to the most obvious conclusion implied in their own questions: true wisdom and miraculous power can only come from God, but that truth was unpalatable to their minds. It offended them or caused them to stumble. The Greek word is the root for our word "scandalised."

So, they began to look for reasons to dismiss the obvious truth before them. Questions can sometimes be used as a defence mechanism against committing ourselves to Jesus Christ. "He can't be who he claimed! He grew up with us, in Nazareth! We know all about his family!" Why these truths should have offended them so much is also unclear, but with a little informed imagination we might be able to guess at some reasons. Perhaps it was simply a case of familiarity breeding contempt. Perhaps, like the Teachers of the Law, they thought he couldn't possibly be the Messiah because the Messiah must come from Bethlehem – since he came to them via Egypt, it's possible they didn't know of his place of birth. Perhaps they thought that Jesus was puffing himself up way above his station as a lowly carpenter or stonemason (in those days the job would have included both trades). When I was a child, an 8-year-old from my hometown of Ipswich won the TV show *Opportunity Knocks*. Her reward was to be beaten up at the local swimming pool by people who were jealous of her trying to make something of herself! Perhaps Jesus' neighbours' reaction betrayed a similar "Who does he think he is?" mentality. Or perhaps their reference to *Mary's* son, rather than the more usual practice of identifying a person's *father*, might indicate a continual prejudice around what they perceived to be his scandalous illegitimate birth.

Whatever the reasons, what is clear is that they closed their minds to Jesus and his claims. One commentator writes, "The people of Nazareth 'knew all the answers' about Jesus: they were not prepared for fresh revelation." We see a very similar mentality towards Jesus in Britain today. The long Christian heritage of this country creates a familiarity that breeds contempt, as it does across most of Western Europe – perhaps even more so! Hence many refer to British culture today as a *post-Christian* era, which makes successful evangelism significantly harder. People think they already know everything there is to know about Jesus from the snippets about him residual in our cultural framework. Since the narrative of that cultural framework is increasingly controlled by those who have rejected Christian faith, what people are actually dismissing is often not true Christianity, but rather the distorted image of Christian faith that has been presented to them by unbelievers. There is a very real sense in which Britain today behaves like a "hometown" towards Jesus.

Tragically, because of this closed attitude towards Jesus in Nazareth, he was prevented from doing them much good. "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." This lack of faith was not insufficient faith in his ability to perform miracles. They'd already declared their firm belief in that ability. Rather, it was their refusal to accept the obvious answers as to the *source* of that power. What we see here, once again, is that miracles were never an end in themselves. Jesus' miracles were meant to act as signs, pointing people to a true understanding of *who he is* – God in human flesh and Saviour of the world. To perform miracles for people who had consciously closed their minds to *this* truth would actually work against God's purposes. For, one of the functions of

suffering is that it is meant to drive us towards seeking God and his salvation. To relieve the suffering of someone who has stubbornly determined to travel in the *opposite* direction would be to remove one of the few things that might just bring them to their senses. It's possible, then, that the few healings he did perform were either prior to them taking offence at him or were performed for the few who were more spiritually open. This is a dynamic of God's purposes we should bear in mind when praying for people to be healed.

But we cannot leave this passage here in such negativity. For instance, Jesus' brothers are mentioned. At this stage, they were among those who didn't believe in him (John 7:5). But, by Acts 1:14, they are listed among his disciples. Probably, others from Nazareth also came to believe in him in time. God can work behind the scenes even with the hardest of hearts. That is an encouragement for us if we have been sharing our faith and praying for people for a long time and are still seeing little progress. For, when people finally encounter the *real* Jesus, instead of the distorted Jesus our culture presents to them, often they come to faith in him.

This is why the Alpha Course has been so effective over the years – because it gives people the opportunity to encounter the *real* Jesus, and to do so at people's *own* pace. So, if you, yourself, aren't yet sure about who this Jesus is, but would like to explore more about him, or if your friends, neighbours, or relatives are open to finding out more about him, there is still time to sign up. I really need to know numbers by Wednesday, so we can prayerfully allocate groups and leaders, but I'd love to hear from you. For, the truth is that there is no better decision that we can ever make than the decision to let the real Jesus into our lives. Amen?

**[Pray]**