

Mark 6:1-13 - Who do you think you are.

I can just imagine Jesus arriving in his hometown and the word gets around – he’s back in town. There will be those who were pleased or even excited and those who were less than pleased to see him. What’s he doing here? Who does he think he is? Of course they thought they knew who he was – the son of Mary – the brother of those named as his brothers James, Justus, Jude and Simon and his sisters, noticed unnamed. And so what is he doing here? It’s a bit like he has the audacity to teach with authority, he clearly showed wisdom which wasn’t appreciated and performing remarkable miracles where just out of their comfort zone completely. One could guess that this was making these people feel uncomfortable even embarrassed about his behaviour.

It is really difficult isn’t it because some of these people would have grown up around him, they knew the family, and they cannot see beyond the young boy and man that he was – the carpenter of Nazareth. We can all be known for who we were in the past, in a particular place where we may have grown up, but we may have changed particularly if we weren’t a Christian and we are one now – because hopefully God has changed us. We are hopefully more than we were - although obviously our personalities are recognizable. And sometimes when people have changed, and I know this from the world of drug rehabilitation, and for those who

have chosen to fight their addiction, that those they used to associate with see the challenge of getting them back on drugs again, or alcohol, or whatever it might be. The way of making the change is to move and to stay away from previous associates. For Jesus if he had returned home in the hope of a time of relaxation among those he knew he would have been sorely disappointed as they wanted to pull him back down to their level. They don’t want to face the challenge and the opportunity he brings. They spend all their efforts on looking for reasons not to pay attention to him. The question, “Who does he think he is?” frees them from the responsibility of hearing what he is saying. If one of his reference points was the way that the prophets had been treated in the past, although disappointed by it, he would not have been surprised by this response. Hence, he says, and I am using the words of the Message here: A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, on the streets he played in as a child. There was nothing for it but to leave Nazareth, they weren’t interested, so it was time to move on to the other villages. Having thought a bit about the context it looks like that even though his own authority was in question it spurred Jesus on to send out the disciples. The vital thing for Jesus was not that people loved and honoured him, but that God’s word is heard, and his will is done.

I don't know about you but when I have been packing a car with family or friends to go away on holiday I often joke whether they have also packed the kitchen sink. Every nook and cranny is filled before we can leave and the car feels as though it is bursting at the seams. I am someone who tries to travel fairly light but I have known people who want to take everything for all occasions. When we have our own transport, we can pile it in. Jesus sends out the 12 two by two. I wonder whether he let them choose their travelling companion or whether he paired them up? But look at what the instruction was: Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money, no extra shirt only sandals and a staff. Now that is really travelling light. That is going to mean that they will not be relying on their own resources. Once again in the Message it says: "Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment. No special appeal for funds. Keep it simple. And no luxury inns. Get a modest place and be content there until you leave."

They had seen how hard it was in Nazareth for Jesus. With that experience I can't imagine that they are going to go out with a great deal of confidence. And now they are going out on their own without any back up, no financial support, no extras to help them out. If they were not welcomed they were to shake the dust off their feet, they weren't to make a scene, just move on.

So just for a moment imagine for yourself and contemplate going out unprotected and insecure and realizing that the only way was to trust in God's power to provide.

Let's just go back to that point and think about for a moment what Jesus is saying in that we are the equipment. I remember many years ago now a student from an African country studying at Trinity College 27 years ago saying that in this country we have so many ways of communicating with people, and that was before mobile phones were available to everyone, and yet we are still lacking in our zeal to share the Gospel with people – to tell people about Jesus. And he was and is so right. During Covid we have found new ways of taking worship on line and in particular live streaming and that is really positive but it does not let us off the hook. We are the equipment that is needed. That is what Jesus is teaching the disciples. You don't need a degree in Theology, you don't need money, you don't need to hide behind anything, and any confidence required is not in ourselves but in Jesus. Jesus sent out the 12, he sent out the 72, and then he sent out every Christian to tell people about Jesus. Let's finish with what happened. "They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different: right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits. They put their faith in Jesus and did as he said. You are the equipment.