

Bible study on Mark 6.1-13

Begin with an opening prayer

Heavenly Father, heavenly King,
we come before you today just as we are.
We come to listen and to learn.
We come and lay everything down
to stand in your awesome presence.
Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

This passage in Mark shows two examples of how misleading status can be, and how it can deafen us to God's voice.

At home in Nazareth, everyone is astounded by the wisdom that comes out of Jesus' mouth and the confirming 'deeds of power' that he performs. A rush of light comes into all their lives, but some greet it not with joy but with suspicion: 'Where did this man get all this?' Rather than judging by the fruits of what he says and does, they judge by social rank and privilege: 'Is not this the carpenter?' You can almost hear the muttering – 'They let any old riff-raff preach these days.' This grudging prejudice prevents them from receiving God's grace. Jesus continues his mission regardless, but is amazed at their unbelief, their stubborn resistance to an experience that could have been life-changing.

There is the same singularity of purpose when Jesus sends the disciples out two by two, telling them to focus on their mission, not wasting time where they are not welcome, but moving on to the next place. The way in which they are to carry out this mission is almost as material beggars: no bread, no bag, no money, no second tunic, no boots only sandals – in other words none of the resources that would make them independent of the people they are going to visit. These are the things that a prudent

traveller would carry in order to be able to eat and to keep themselves warm at night. But they are not even to carry the necessities of life, let alone arrive and impress people by their glossy wealth and generosity, in the way that many present-day missions attempt to do. This is an open-handed mission and the first open hand belongs to the disciples, asking for hospitality. Ironically, it is this vulnerability that means that the disciples are invited into the heart of a village, staying with local people, hearing their stories and their concerns and speaking to them in a way that is direct and personal about the good news of the kingdom of God, rather than delivering a pre-packaged message. This is only one model of mission of the range represented in Scripture, so it will not always be applicable; but it stands in striking contrast to a power-dressed message intended to impress.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

How would you react to someone who said they were an evangelist and God had told them to stay at your house? In today's world, 'Of course' may not be the first or most obvious response that comes to mind! However, when Jesus sent out his disciples on their missionary activities, he knew the Hebrew (Old Testament) tradition of showing hospitality to the stranger or foreigner. And it is a practice that, as the New Testament shows, remains firmly within the Christian tradition too. How, then, should we respond to strangers? Do we take the issue of hospitality as seriously as Scripture encourages us to do? And if not, why not? Do we need to pray for a spirit of generosity and warmth towards those seeking the love and help that only Jesus can provide?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- If this was you and your family, how might you be feeling?
- When have you had to be prepared to be vulnerable?
- How can we make ourselves more able to trust in God's sufficiency?

Prayer

A prayer of praise

O God, all-sufficient one,
we give you thanks and praise that you are all we need.
You are enough.

Thank you that you love us so much,
and provide everything we need for the journey of life.
You didn't promise that following you would be easy,
but we thank you that you care about us
as you do the birds of the sky and the lilies in the field.

You know our every need.

Thank you that your thoughts are higher than our thoughts,
your ways higher than our ways.

Thank you that when we come to you empty,
your arms reach out to embrace us.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord, you sent your disciples into the world
to share your word with those in need –
may we approach this coming week with a similar desire.

You sent them carrying little but trusting much –
may we live this week with a similar attitude.

May our lives be less about us and our needs,
and more about you,

and your love and care for all people
in all places and circumstances.

May we love as you love.

We ask in your name.

Amen.