

Local Hero?

Mark 6: 1-13

Have you ever caught yourself watching TV while simultaneously googling one of the actors or presenters? Just me??? Surely not...

It's so easy to find out about the people we watch - where they went to school... where they grew up... what they studied at uni or what jobs they've done... sometimes that makes me more impressed ... other times it's more like it cuts them down to size...

This is how people see Jesus here in Mark's gospel... cut down to size...It's a bit like they've checked out his Wikipedia entry and found he's nothing special after all: *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?*

Local boy made good Jesus is not... for these people...

So far in Mark's gospel it's been a wild round of dramatic healings and similar, culminating in his bringing back to life the daughter of the synagogue leader, Jairus, in a place nearby... and now Jesus returns to his hometown... With this build-up, you might be expecting a ticker-tape parade or a ride around town on an open-topped bus in the style of victorious sports stars. But not quite so: although at first they seem impressed by his wisdom, soon Jesus is not so much a local hero, but a figure whom the crowds question... they wonder how it's possible for him to be causing such a stir, given who they *know* he is... simply the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon...

Just the local builder, then... so *where*, people ask *did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands?*

How different these questions are to what the breathless disciples ask, once the storm is over – *who then is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?* Jesus, as far as his neighbours are concerned, is an unlikely miracle worker or philosopher... perhaps he's even a fraud... he's certainly not an educated man, the kind of person a proper rabbi would be... who does he think he is...!?

And who *does* Jesus think he is? The gospels and Christian thought across the ages proclaim that he *is* fully human and fully God – and we will have our chance to affirm this in the words of the creed later today. Yet I wonder about his sense of self – his sense of who he was and what he was there for – Did it develop rather than spring fully formed? Did this scene of rejection hurt him? Or did he know all along this would happen? Mark tells us that Jesus was amazed at the unbelief he encounters. ... But it's his explanation

to his disciples that sticks in the mind ... a phrase that was proverbial in Jesus' time as it is in ours: *'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'* ... Jesus places himself in the long line of people who were ignored when they proclaimed God's message... because familiarity breeds contempt.... As we think of the gap between who people thought Jesus was and who he really was, who he became, we may turn to think of our own beginnings... of our potential and who we have become...

I remember when young getting tired of people asking what I wanted to be when I grew up. I had no answer, though if I had paid more attention to the way I created my own lending library with the books I owned... and the fact that the local public library was my second home, I suppose I should have guessed at one part of my life...

When we are young, we may have amazing dreams at quite a young age... and for some people, the dream does become a reality...even though it may not fit with where we began in lots of ways

Amongst the stories of last week's general election, one that caught my eye was that of Joe Morris the newly elected Labour MP for Hexham and local boy made good. He said: *Even my own grandma usually votes Conservative. I'm relatively sure she voted for me today... you'd hope...* Just as we don't know how Joe Morris's grandma voted, what Jesus' family actually thought about him is mostly hidden – other gospel writers say that Mary, his mother, thought deeply about what was going on, but we don't know much more than that. I wonder whether they had any idea about the direction of travel...

Because who Jesus becomes *is* someone and also in a way *not* someone – he *is* a charismatic figure – this little story tells us about the people who are not impressed – but they stand in contrast to the many more people – crowds of them – that are drawn to him. And yet one of the most famous things he says in Mark's gospel about how to become one of his followers – how to become *like him* - doesn't focus on being flashy or successful in the usual way, but rather on giving up something of who you already are – *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

In our society where everyone's a celebrity (from the real stars who have claimed the spotlight because of talent... through to people who are famous for being famous) this is a revolutionary thing to say – if you want to follow me, you need to think less about yourself and more about others...

What does that look like for us as we think about the week ahead? In how we engage with our colleagues or neighbours... in how we are in conversation or behind the wheel of our cars... ?

What does it look like as we consider the longer term? What are our ambitions and dreams...and how do they align with the gospel and Jesus' challenging words?

The collect for today begins and ends with God's good gifts, God's good promises for us... promises that exceed all our dreams and ambitions... that are beyond our capacity to comprehend, and unlike the kinds of things we may expect... we pray for grace to recognise and obtain them...I'll pray it again for us...

*Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire...*