**Not limited by Expectations July 4 2021 Mark 6:1-13**

When I was undertaking my DipEd I recall preparing a presentation on the power of teacher expectations upon student outcomes. There was a wealth of research on this subject all pointing to there being a significant correlation between the teacher’s expectations of their students and the results they achieved or failed to achieve.

I recall a story about a teacher in America who really struggled to warm to one of the children in her Grade 4 class. The child was struggling academically, was poorly cared for and his mother had died 18 months ago. Throughout the year his academic performance continued to deteriorate. However at Christmas time when he gave her some simple gifts from his mother’s things her attitude was completely transformed. She worked with him constantly and he made dramatic progress. He ended up training as a Doctor and eventually graduating as the dux of his year.

Expectations create the platform from which we operate. What we expect can influence what we are willing to be receptive to. The people of Jesus day had expectations regarding Jesus and vastly different expectations regarding the Messiah. Earlier in Mark’s gospel we read of some attributing Jesus actions to a demon, or the devil. We also read of his own family coming to take him home as people had been saying that Jesus was mentally disturbed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**As we work with God, we need to accept that some people will not accept the message of Jesus.**

In this passage Jesus is the focus of several derogatory comments. It was contrary to Jewish language usage for a son to be called the son of his mother. Calling Jesus Mary’s son was unusual and usually derogatory, even if the father had died, they were still normally known as the son of their father. It could even point to rumours regarding the circumstances of Jesus conception. Then there were comments regarding his being a local man, there was nothing extraordinary about his family, why would there be something extraordinary about him? Likewise, the reference to being a carpenter was derogatory. He had not been trained in the Rabbinic form, but had been trained to be a manual labourer, why should his comments in the synagogue be heeded.

Hence during this story, we see that Jesus teaching in the synagogue initially provoked astonishment, then questioning, then some were offended, (even scandalised, is a more appropriate translation) then the people were unbelieving. Jesus is well known to these people, yet they do not know the source of his wisdom and miraculous power, and they find his ministry offensive. Jesus is turning out to be significantly different to their expectations, which necessitates a significant shift in their thinking, and some are not prepared to make this shift.

As we encounter these responses to the ministry of Jesus it reminds us that some people will not be accepting of the message of Jesus. Coping with this form of rejection will characterise Jesus ministry, and will also be the experience of his followers. Finding ways to handle people potentially rejecting a message which is central and precious to us, is one of the challenges, or costs of our discipleship.

**As we work with God, we need to join our faith together with that of others.**

As our expectations create a platform from which we operate, so too the atmosphere of the group of which we are a part creates a platform from which we operate.

I expect we have all experienced the unpleasant feeling of being in a setting where a group views you with suspicion, hostility, apathy or defensiveness. Serious attitudinal changes need to occur in these settings to allow co-operative work to happen.

Such attitudes are apparent in this story, Jesus is in the midst of an unreceptive community, his own hometown is unreceptive. Jesus ministry here was hindered by these attitudes. The power of God is free to move when there is receptivity, but refusing to believe hinders this. “[T]he atmosphere of faith is an essential part of the Kingdom being established….the presence of Jesus will not produce miracles in the atmosphere of total unbelief and resistance.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Miracles occur in the context of relationships both individual and corporate. Where there is animosity, people are not receptive to perceiving what Jesus would reveal if there was openness. We read that Jesus could just heal a few who were sick here. The atmosphere that pervaded hindered his work. We read that Jesus “marvelled” at their unbelief.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is one of only two instances where this word is used in the gospels, the other being Jesus marvelling at the faith of the Centurion.[[4]](#footnote-4) The level of unbelief was apparently very significant and thereby created an atmosphere of resistance to Jesus ministry. God respects our free will. As they remain closed to what he is saying and doing he will take his ministry elsewhere.

It reminds us of the significance of our attitudes together as the people of God. We have opportunities together to encourage one another in faith, but sadly we also have the potential to discourage one another. Our attitudes as a community of faith feed into the work that God can do in and through us.

**As we work with God we need to depend on God**

God was doing a new thing in Jesus. This newness, the unexpected nature of his ministry challenged his disciples and the broader community. Jesus “will constantly shatter all our categories and formulae, because he is greater than them all.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Despite the inexperience of his followers and their wavering faith, Jesus still sent them out in his authority to do what he has been doing. They went with a challenging message, their message and actions would not leave people undisturbed. They too were part of the new thing God was doing in Jesus.

This early story of the disciples mission is like a limited training exercise. They were not to make provision for a long journey this was to be a short, but urgent task and they were to be dependant on the hospitality of others. “Preaching the kingdom left no time for fuss about personal well-being.”[[6]](#footnote-6) In taking nothing with them they were forced to be dependent upon God primarily, and upon the hospitality and generosity of other people.

From the outset they are reminded that this is the work of God in which they are sharing, co-operating with God.

They were to be visiting ‘alien’ territory and it is expected that some will reject their message and actions, so they are told how to respond. They are not to dwell on any sense of failure, they are to move on and offer their message and the gifts of God’s Spirit to other places. They are to continue to recognise that this is God’s work, in which they share and to depend on God for all they need to fulfil their part.

They were sent on this mission in pairs which may have reminded them of the Mosaic law which affirms that the truthfulness of a message is confirmed by two or three witnesses. Going out in pairs or groups also supports our own frailty as individuals and affirms the vital role of Christian fellowship as we engage in mission.

The disciples operated in the power and authority of Jesus they were his representatives, they point to the intrusion of the Kingdom of God into their daily reality of life. They were called, as we are, to risk themselves in dependence on the gospel and the power of God.

So for us today these stories challenge us to consider:

How big is our vision of what God calls us to be about?

It reminds us that

Our faith in God involves risk taking, attempting new things, being clearly known as followers of Jesus.

Our faith in God is based on the understanding that we need God, we need God to work through us, regardless of our inherent capabilities, we are called to share in the work which God is doing in our world, which requires gifts that only God can give.

As we engage in mission, we have the blessing of the community of the church. Our fellowship and sharing with one another enables our faith to be strengthened by the faith of others.

1. Mark 3:20-21, 31-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Donald English, *The Message of Mark,* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1992) 119 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mark 6:6a [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matt 8:10; Lk 7:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. English, *The Message of Mark,* 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. English, *The Message of Mark,* 124 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)