

Pentecost 6 – 9am Wesley – 8th July 2012

Theme: “Sharing our faith”

Reading: Mark 6:1- 13

Introduction

Over the past few weeks the Gospel readings from Mark have centred on Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God.

Some of this teaching has been in the form of parables to the people in Mark 4 using the imagery of seeds and the growth that proceeds from some but fails in others.

Then we have seen the Kingdom of God at work through Jesus, with the calming of the storm in the last section of Mark 4 and the healing miracles of Mark 5.

It is with this in mind that suddenly we have Jesus powerless and rejected in his hometown of Nazareth in Mark 6:1-6, which seems incongruous with the preceding chapters of Mark. However, the second half of today’s Gospel reading (verses 7-13) has Jesus sending out the twelve disciples in pairs to witness to the power of the Kingdom of God by giving the disciples “authority over evil spirits” and instructions for the journey. When Jesus could have ‘been down on himself’ he actually changes tack and gives authority to the disciples to go out and minister to the people.

What a contrast between the two sections of scripture!

On the one hand we read in verses 5/6a “Jesus could not do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.” while the disciples in verse 12 “drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

Jesus empowered the disciples and in faith they responded.

In a sense, this was a beginning lesson for the disciples to follow when Jesus was no longer with them. Our faith comes out at some amazing times.

Story

As I was reading around this passage I came across a remarkable story, only one side of it did I know from my leadership teaching in the military. It concerned Hugh Thompson being given an honorary degree at Emory University some years ago. His honorary degree was awarded for his integrity and ethical decision making in a war setting.

His story is as follows. “On March 16th 1968, Thompson was flying a routine chopper mission in Vietnam when he happened to fly over the village of Mai Lai just as American troops, under the command of Lieutenant William Calley, were

slaughtering dozens of unarmed villagers – old men, women and children suspected of being Viet Cong sympathisers. Thompson set his chopper down between the troops and the remaining civilians. He ordered his tail gunner to train his weapon on the American soldiers and ordered those on the ground to stop killing the villagers. Hugh Thompson’s actions saved the lives of dozens of people. However, initially he was

threatened with court-martial for his actions. It was some thirty years later that the army awarded him the Soldier's Medal for his actions."

As Thompson stood at the microphone to speak, the usually rowdy student body quietened. Then Thompson talked about his simple faith, simple words. Speaking of what his parents taught him as a child he said, "they taught me, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you unto you." The students were amazed to hear these words of Jesus, words from Sunday School, words of Christian testimony spoken at a university graduation ceremony. Thompson's words had weight because the man had 'walked the talk' in the midst of battle. The students leapt to their feet and gave him a standing ovation.

In the same way, the church will not be heard if what we do as Christians is incongruous with what we say about faith.

Reflection

This may well challenge us to think, 'Where have we seen faith in action?'

Let's reflect on that for a moment and see if we, from within the congregation, can come up with some specific faith stories. "Where have we seen faith in action?"

(spend some time chatting about faith in action and reflecting back)

Rev John Mallison in his book 'Caring for People' (UniChurch Publishing, page 89) suggests some guidelines about 'sharing our faith with others'. I have changed some of his thoughts around a little to better suit today!

- every Christian disciple is meant to be a witness to Christ
- we witness by who we are and what we do
- we witness also by spoken word
- however, not every Christian has the gift of evangelism and healing
- it is essential to 'be real and be yourself'
- love the people you talk to
- listen effectively to them and be interested in them
- be comfortable about saying 'I don't know'
- as appropriate, share your own faith story (not easy)
- be sensitive, show respect and develop genuine friendships
- don't be overbearing or argumentative
- allow the Holy Spirit to guide you and prompt you in what you say and do
- pray for those you share with – possibly pray with them also
- accept that not all will look at faith in the same way as you
(reminded that Jesus was 'amazed at their lack of faith')
- praise God when some-one takes a 'step of faith'

- praise God when out of difficult times we see change occur both in ourselves and in others

This is by no means an exhaustive list but gives us points to think about as we consider sharing our faith with others.

Teaching

The word for us in this text today is that we are not held responsible for the response to our ministry in Christ's name. Even Jesus had times where people failed to respond and rejected him. However we are responsible for our own faithfulness in following Jesus and witnessing to his presence in our lives. With such assurance we are called to witness faithfully and boldly. Amen.