

Following Jesus: Disciples of a Rejected Prophet Take the Road

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost Year B—7 July 2024

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Ezekiel 2; Psalm 123; 2Corinthians 12.2-10; Mark 6.1-13

INTRODUCTION

I know that I haven't got through life without some measure of rejection and repudiation, deserved or otherwise. I suspect most of us share that experience.

I also further suspect that most of you did not find the experience life exhilarating and life-enhancing. We may even have found it life-denying, debilitating or worse.

Indeed, we may have prayed the anguished prayer of Psalm 123:

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
For we have had more than enough of contempt.
Our soul has had more than its fill
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

Jesus used the psalms as his prayer book, and I wonder if he used this prayer when his hometown repudiated him.

JESUS' REJECTION: WE WANT BIGGER AND BETTER, PLEASE

In Jesus' case his opponents' rejection would eventually turn into deadly action. But that is in the future.

Previously in the story his family has already shown their ambivalence towards him. Now the town that raised him displays their disdain. They effectively call him a charlatan or deceiver.

They ask the right questions like where does this man get his wisdom and power? Remember the disciples' question at the stilling of the storm? Who then is this that wind and the sea obey him? Earlier, what is this, a new authority? By what authority?

They draw the wrong conclusion. He's a local of dubious origins. He's just someone like us. Like us he learnt his trade as a carpenter or handyman. He is not a great man, a powerful man. He has no advantages in wealth, education, social status. Surely God works through the great and the mighty of the earth?

WE WANT BIGGER AND BETTER.

How old is the myth that the great and powerful alone can save us? Surely the twentieth and twenty-first century have taught us that that myth is moth-eaten beyond repair.

The people diminish Jesus'. He has scandalised the neighbourhood by showing that, although he does great and good things among them, he is different. He lives, speaks and works in and from a different universe. In his universe God rules in a new order of things through Jesus. That upsets the status quo.

Hence Jesus' analysis. "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and their own house." So, his fellow citizens cut him down to size, rob him of family and clan identity.

Jesus describes this as lack of trust, pure and simple. They are not afraid of him; they just don't trust him or his word. That brings the work of the kingdom almost to a grinding halt among them; the work that matters most to Jesus, of healing and letting the captives go free.

The work of the kingdom, you'll notice, is relational not propositional nor transactional. They believed God existed. They believed God was on their side. They did their best for God and his law. They just did not trust God's prophet when he came to set them free. We can make that mistake, too. We too use the word faith to mean believing a proposition.

Trust is relational. Their lack of relational trust astounded Jesus. They claimed a knowledge of God but could not discern God at work. They didn't trust him. No trust, no work of God. That's not punishment or revenge. That is the nature of things. God is relational and trust in him is key to unlocking that universe.

I wonder if that puts a challenge to us in our present circumstances. I wonder what you think.

Disowned, but not defeated, Jesus withdraws and takes up his itinerant mission to the village circuit.

JESUS' CALL TO MISSION: WELCOME, HEALING, SETTING FREE

For the first time Jesus commissions his disciples to participate in his work and rejection.

This the beginning of the apostolic mission that we inherit to this day. So we need to pay attention.

All *authority* for mission comes from and is given by Jesus. We have none of our own. And we must trust his authority. Trust is critical. Does he have authority to give us this authority?

Jesus derives his authority from God himself present in the midst of human history. That is a crucial element of his baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved." Either that is true or it is not. If it is true, then I am bound to wager my life on the trust that Jesus is the ultimate authority. My only response can be that I trust his authority.

If it is not true, we are deceivers and fraudsters on a grand scale claiming an authority we do not have.

The missionary lifestyle is *simplicity*. It is not a life of acquisition. It is not a life of power, gaining adherents like a political party or wealth and property to support the power.

By simplicity I do not mean simple-mindedness. We need to sharpen our minds to the finest edge, everyone to the best of our ability. Simplicity is learning to live with integrity; with wealth, goods, power, status seen through the unwavering lens of the cross.

The ultimate goal of the mission was to set people free, whether it be a demon, sin or sickness. *And to do that they told a story.*

We must have the story to tell. The story is about how God rules his creation. He rules it in Jesus, the rejected prophet and no other way. He rules as the crucified and risen God who brings reconciliation, healing, and release from the powers that bind humans.

We, the readers, know that Jesus who rules does so from a cross. We know he overcomes death in the resurrection. The first disciples only knew that as promise. We know it as a reality we celebrate every Sunday in the Eucharist and the Word.

When they told that story, they had a point to make. The listeners had to make a decision about the story. Was it true? And if it was, what next? They a point to press home.

The message was simple: Repent which is not flailing about the floor finding sins to mention. Instead, it requires changing our whole vision of how the universe works and what it works

towards: A God-centred universe heading towards and meeting beauty, truth, justice, love and joy and much more.

To do that the sin of self and idolatry must go because they speak of another vision of the universe; one run by us and us alone, achieving our goals just as we have done with the environment and warring nation-states. Add poverty, homelessness, the denigration and destruction of indigenous people.

Thus, trust enters again. Do we trust that God's universe has the goal of the destruction of the demonic in any form and the re-creation of the damaged, humans and other parts of creation? Do we trust Christ to put our future under his authority?

CONCLUSION

I can't answer any of those questions except for myself. I can only do it every day. I can only make Paul's words my own;

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

What do you do?