

Sunday 4th July 2021, Dreghorn and Springside Church

Bible Reading: Mark 6:1-13

¹ Jesus left that place and went back to his hometown, followed by his disciples. ² On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there; and when they heard him, they were all amazed. "Where did he get all this?" they asked. "What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles?" ³ Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters living here?" And so they rejected him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own hometown and by their relatives and their family."

⁵ He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith.

Then Jesus went to the villages around there, teaching the people. ⁷ He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. He gave them authority over the evil spirits ⁸ and ordered them, "Don't take anything with you on the trip except a walking stick—no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets. ⁹ Wear sandals, but don't carry an extra shirt." ¹⁰ He also told them, "Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that place. ¹¹ If you come to a town where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them!" ¹² So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. ¹³ They drove out many demons and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them."

Sermon: Teamwork makes the dream work!

On the day of my graduation from Glasgow University all of us candidates for ministry in the Church of Scotland, attended a special service with invited guests at the University Chapel. The preacher stood up and recounted this Bible story... well that's not strictly true, the preacher actually just focused on the opening lines of it, the sentences that are full of adulation. As if we were being sent into such a glorious and appreciated ministry. But as every minister, and every congregation knows that is really only the half of it, if the preacher had continued to read and expound the rest of the passage then that would have been far more accurate foundation for the ministries that followed.

In our Bible reading we learn that initial responses of astonishment soon turn sour in Jesus' hometown synagogue as locals begin to have a dig at him. They question his origins. They describe him as "the carpenter," "the son of Mary," they rhyme off brothers and sisters, but miss out any mention of a father figure.

So, they know a lot about him, they know his story, they cut him down to size, bring him down a notch or two, put him in his place. In first century, Jewish culture, not having a lineage through your father was seen as not having honour, it was a scandal. The locals are hinting that he was conceived illegitimately, this then is their focus, not on all the healings, and teachings, not the good and positive, but instead they try and bring him down. How sad, how true that is of our fallen human nature whatever country or age you live in.

Jesus refuses to let their labels define him, he chooses his own designation – a prophet, he responds by reminding them that "Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own hometown and by

their relatives and their family” (Mark 6:4). The locals do not honour him, and as a consequence Jesus could do very little among them.

God has the power to do the most amazing things. God has the power to remake and reshape people, to bring glory from our story. Opportunities for his grace and goodness to be revealed. God is the God of second chances, and third and fourth - but are we nearly so good, and so gracious? Can we see the positives in others? Are we so forgiving of others? Do we want to see others thrive? Or would we prefer to say, I know who you are, I know your past.

Can God do great things among us here? Can God do great things through our own people? Can God work miracles here? Will we give God space? Will we give our neighbour space to grow and be all they can be in God?

In the second half of our Bible reading, we read of Jesus sending out his disciples in twos to minister among the surrounding villages, to share the good news of God’s Kingdom - disrupting the status quo, heralding in God’s new day.

A few weeks ago Alison Muir, Aylice Millar, Joanne Milliken and I all graduated from the Forge Scotland Mission Pioneer course at an event in the Howard Centre in Kilmarnock. We took part in the course to skill us up, to set up the Crossing Together Church plant. As part of our training, we were helped to identify where our ministry gifts lie. And we focused on Ephesians 4:11-13, which goes like this:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Ministry is not the job of one, but it is a shared enterprise, and we see here five different ministry callings, five distinct gifts.

There is the gift of the Apostle. An Apostle is someone who is sent out. Apostles are visionaries, pioneers, Apostles push into new territory, they innovate and plant churches and set up Kingdom building initiatives.

Then there is the gift of the prophet. A prophet is someone who is especially attuned to hearing from God and speaking God’s story for today. Prophets have the wisdom to stand back and assess a situation from a Kingdom perspective, and then find creative ways to share a vision for the way ahead.

Evangelists are people with a special gift for sharing God’s good news. They are at home among non-Christians, they are great at bringing people together and helping non-Christians hear and receive the gospel in a way that is relevant and meaningful in their lives.

Then there are the pastors, or shepherds who care for others, these are people with the special gift of a tender heart, who recognise the needs in others. Shepherd/pastors are good at bringing comfort and encouraging others. They have plenty of patience and empathy.

And then there are the teachers. A teacher in this context, is someone who helps others to understand the gospel, what that means for us today and how we can apply the gospel in our lives.

As part of our Forge course, we each explored our ministry gifting. I came out with my highest as being Apostle, that's where the drive for Crossing Together comes from and joint top was also teaching, which is what I do a lot in preaching and Bible study.

And teamwork is a wonderful thing because someone else in the team scored highest on pastor/shepherd, someone else on evangelist and yet another one of us on prophet. And between us, working as a team we make a whole, we complement one another. You might say, teamwork makes the dream work!

This is ministry. Jesus sent out the disciples in twos, to complement each other's gifts and to support each other. I would like to see us release the potential in our own people at Dreghorn and Springside, I would like to see a pastoral care team as part of our ongoing ministry, especially as we continue to face COVID and its consequences. I would like to a mission team made up of people who, like the disciples don't expect folks to just come to us, but rather are eager and willing to meet people where they are - sharing the good news, whatever that looks like there - on our streets, and also an increased social media presence. I'd like to see a worship team, leading worship in our congregation and also in Messy Church and in Crossing Together, and assisting with worship online, as we develop our livestreaming service. There are lots more opportunities, please do look at the 'situations vacant' intimation on our website - if you can help be, and support our shared ministry endeavour. God's people all working together, one body, many parts, diverse locations, all loving God and loving our neighbour – being God's church.

And yes, we will face those who have a go at us. Jesus and the disciples faced it before us. But rather than listen to the folks saying, 'who do you think you are'? Think about God, who does God think you are - you are God's treasure, you are God's pride and joy, God loves you and has gifts to share with you, and through you to share these with others.

And take heed of his words to the disciples, if folks don't accept you, then move on, because the time is not yet right for that person. On the Forge course we focused on seeking out 'people of peace'. They are the people who warm to you, who give you time, who are interested. These people of peace are the ones we can most effectively engage with first, they are the ones that God has been working on before we arrived on the scene.

So, to conclude, God has a mission in the world, and he has called his church to be part of that mission. As a part of God's church, God treasures you, loves you and has blessed you by calling and gifting you to share in this mission. We know it's not going to be easy particularly among our own folks, even Jesus found that bit hard. But we are called, and we are gifted by God, and this is a shared enterprise, God, you, and everyone else in the church. We are sent out to work together, to innovate, to share God's timely word, to build community around Jesus, to care for the poorest and the sickest, and to demonstrate what it is to be a faithful disciple - as we go and seek out 'people of peace' to share the gospel, God's good news with.

Jamie Milliken
4th July 2021