

Pentecost 6 – 04/07/21 - Bishop Cam Venables

Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; **Psalm 48**; **2Corinthians 12:2-10**; **Mark 6:1-13**

When we consider today's Gospel it seems that 'tall poppy' syndrome is not unique to Australian for this tendency to mock and disregard those who achieve in public life appears to have been present in the little town of Nazareth two thousand years ago.

Through his teaching and miracles Jesus had developed a celebrity reputation and was known as a prophet. But, when he went to the synagogue in his home town we understand that his listeners were 'astounded' – and wondered about the source of his wisdom. 'Isn't he the carpenter?' they pointed out. 'Don't we know his family?' they asked... and they appear to have been offended. Somehow, he was too familiar; they'd known him for too long; and surely... God could not be at work through one so ordinary!

There's something in this community's response to Jesus for us to think about. Are we open to the possibility of God being present and at work through familiar people and activity, or do we more readily recognise God in new people and activity? Would we anticipate prayers for healing being answered when three friends pray for this in a home group, or when prayers are offered in the midst of a large church service with all the bells and whistles? Surely the answer is both because God's Spirit will be present and active in each gathering as people pray in faith.

At Nazareth we are told that Jesus did no deeds of power; that only a few people were healed through his prayers... and that he was amazed at the unbelief of the community he had grown up in.

However, he didn't seem to dwell on it, but kept on going. He didn't wring his hands, or berate the community for their lack of belief, and he didn't give up because he wasn't getting a good reception. It seems that his motivation was not to win approval in the eyes of other people, but to make possible the healing and wholeness that comes from God in the lives of others.

When we do things for others; when we reach out and offer care in some form; when we lead worship, or exercise some other form of ministry... do we do these things to win approval, or do we do them to serve? Do we do these things hoping that other people will notice and applaud, or, do we do them because we have a sense that by doing them God will bless others?

The Gospel reading then goes on to explain that Jesus was not a one-man band! Instead of insisting that all sick people had to come to him, Jesus sent the twelve disciples out with the authority to preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick. This was an important shift in the ministry of Jesus and one we can helpfully think further about. Instead of allowing himself to be the only player he raised up leadership to go and do what he had been doing... and, God worked through those people. So, while he was working on earth Jesus raised up leadership, gave those people authority, taught and encouraged them, and reflected with them on their experiences, before sending them out again.

Theoretically this is what the Church has done through the centuries to this day - sometimes well, and sometimes... less well! In our lifetime we have often, in the Anglican Church, expected our ministers to be multi-talented one man bands who do not raise up and empower others in leadership and ministry. Even the language we use has implications for when we call an Ordained person a 'minister' the sub-text is that all others are ministered to! And, if those who are not Ordained but exercise leadership in various forms of ministry do

we adequately value their ministry by authorising them as 'Liturgical Assistants' rather than 'Lay Ministers'? Would love to hear your thoughts on this.

The understanding that we are each called to ministry when we are baptised can still come as a bit of a shock to those who have been taught to be passive. But, if we accept that we are each gifted by God, and are each called to use our gifts to be a blessing, then there is huge potential to be released in future years.

For unlike a basketball game, where the majority of the people in a stadium rightly understand themselves to be spectators watching gifted athletes compete, the game of 'Church' should have most people present playing on the team! There would be some people on the reserve bench, and a small number of spectators... who would be welcome to play on the team when they're ready!

Thinking about that basketball metaphor, I wonder where you perceive yourself to be at the moment? Do you have sense that you are playing the game and that you are in the right place to use your gifts well? Do you have a sense that you are on the reserve bench and you really want to play but are not sure who you should speak to? Or, do you think of yourself as a spectator... and your happy to stay there?

Another important insight from this Gospel, is that Jesus did not send people out to minister by themselves but sent them in pairs. This is significant and I think the Church has not always done this well. The common sense of the approach is obvious because when there are two people there is the potential for mutual support and mutual accountability.

So... who do you and I pray with regularly – for mutual support, and accountability? It may be with a spouse, a close friend, a small group, or a minister – but the inference in the Gospel is that it this is an important thing for us to do.

In considering the Gospel today at least three questions have emerged for us to take away and think about:

- What is our motivation when we are ministering to others?
- If church was a game, like basketball, are we players; are we on the reserve bench; or are we spectators?

and, finally...

- Who is the person, or the people, that we regularly pray with for support and accountability?

May God bless you, and me, as we think further about these.

Friends, let's close this time with prayer:

Holy God we give thanks for the gift of our lives, and the gift of your love. We give thanks for your invitation to use our abilities and resources to bless others and ask for the guidance of your Spirit as we do this. We pray in the name of the one who heals, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen