

Mark 6: 1-13

Pymble 8.7.18

Hometown Rejection

Personal rejection is a powerful feeling. Experienced early enough in life and in a sustained way we know it can have profoundly negative effects on psychological development; it can impact people's ability to maintain relationships and even colour how they see the world. Childhood experiences of parental rejection, friends excluding you from "the group" or your teenage love not being reciprocated are all experiences that will usually be remembered for decades because they touch us deeply and connect with our sense of our self-worth. But rejection at any age or stage is painful.

The scriptures tell us rejection is an experience that Jesus knows well. In John chapter 1 we hear that the Word of God, "*came to his own and his own people did not accept him*" which sounds like a statement about humanity as a whole rejecting God's Word, Jesus.

In Romans 9-11, the Apostle Paul wrestles with the fact that, by and large, the Jews have rejected Jesus as their Saviour. But in our gospel reading today, the rejection is even more personal – these verses describe Jesus returning to his hometown, Nazareth, where his family and the people with whom he grew up, give him a very cold shoulder.

While Matthew and Luke record a version of this story, only Mark includes Jesus' own family among those who reject and dishonor him.

When Jesus states that *a prophet is not without honour except in his own hometown*, in Mark, Jesus adds, *and among their own kin and in their own home*.

Combined with the awkward scenes in Chapter 3 where Jesus' family think he is out of his mind and where Jesus prioritises those who do the will of God over seeing his family members, it seems at least from Mark's perspective, there was some tension between Jesus and his mother, brothers and sisters. Perhaps they did not approve of Jesus' ministry and lifestyle which may have impacted the family negatively, especially as it seems his earthly father Joseph has died or is off the scene.

The town's initial response to Jesus appears quite positive. It seems to begin with astonishment and even delight at the local boy made good.

"Where did he get all this? What wisdom has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands?"

But then the wonder appears to shift towards resentment.

"Is this not the carpenter, Mary's son? Are not his brothers and sisters here with us?"

The issue seems to be his authority:

does he have the credentials to do what he has been doing, to teach and to heal?

It is as if, because they have known him as a boy, and a young man, that they won't allow him to rise above his allotted status.

We could imagine the barbs:

"How dare he think that he can be a 'someone'!

How dare he claim that he is better than us?"

I taught him his numbers.

I cut wood for him.

And now he claims to speak for God?"

We are told they took offence at him, meaning literally, they were *scandalized* on his account.

I think I have referred to this once before, but in my last year at theological college a young Rotuman or Fijian woman began in first year. I didn't have much to do with her, but I remember her being almost painfully shy and I recall her naturally wild hair, as if she had come straight from an Island village. After I left college, the next time I saw her might have been 5 or 6 years later, and she was presenting a theological paper at a conference. Her hair was short, she was working on her PhD and she spoke confidently using her own life experiences in her theological reflections. I was pleasantly surprised to see the transformation in her but I wondered how difficult it might have been for her island family to accept those very profound changes. Perhaps it is this sort of change that made the hometown crowd so incredulous at Jesus.

For those who have experienced rejection in their lives, it may be some comfort to know that the Jesus we honour as Lord and Saviour similarly experienced rejection.

He has truly shared our humanity in every respect.
And when the feelings of sadness, worthlessness or self doubt arise
we can go to Christ knowing that he hears us
because he has walked in our shoes.
This is a powerful gift of what we call the incarnation –
that God has become one of us, to share our frame
and to know our human experiences from the inside, as it were.

Now for the balance of this sermon I would like to reflect on
a different question that might arise from this reading.
Given that Jesus' family was part of those
who rejected him in some way,
and given that today the Church is thought of as Jesus' family,
I want to raise the difficult question
of whether there might be times when we ourselves reject Jesus?
That's quite a thought isn't it?
I mean, like his own earthly family, the Church –
the very movement in and of his name –
ought to be the ones closest to him
and the ones most supportive of what he stands for.
And yet I wonder if at times we become too familiar with Jesus
and the stories about him and think that we might already know
all that there is to know?
Or I wonder if in our clever theological thinking we might end up
rejecting the very values that Jesus stood for?
Or perhaps we allow the pressures of society
to push us in such a way that might make us
more like enemies of Christ than friends and followers.

One area that I think we have to be very careful about
is our politics and passions.
It can become too easy to end up rejecting Christ
when we blindly follow political colours, be they red or blue.
In Alabama in the US for example, high profile evangelical Christians
late last year supported Roy Moore's campaign for the Senate,
despite the fact that he wanted to remove the amendments
that gave the vote to women and to Black Americans.
He also seemed to condone or at least downplay
the impact of slavery in comments he made.
This is to say nothing of the 9 accusations of sexual misconduct
against him, which, it needs to be stated, remain untested.
The point I am making is that some parts of the Church
seem to be able to divorce the known values of Jesus
from their political passions,
and perhaps in doing so they are rejecting Jesus
as much as those from Nazareth did all those centuries ago.

I don't wish to make this a left or right matter –
I think it occurs on both sides of the political spectrum –
but there is a limit to the diversity that we rightly value
in this nation and in our Church.
We can't stretch Christ's words to support just anything.
We can't stretch Christ's words to support racism, or misogyny;
we can't stretch Christ's words to support removing children from their parents
or to equate a national agenda with Christ's mission.
And if we do, we find our Christian voice diminished and compromised.
I guess I am especially thinking of the US context
but I don't think we are too far behind here in Australia.

But let's have a look at a video made by many Church leaders in the US
to call out this kind of blasphemy in Christ's name.
This is called ***Reclaiming Jesus in a time of Crisis...***

<https://sojo.net/media/reclaiming-jesus-time-crisis>

(See below for the text)

The Church must be involved in politics in the sense of assessing policies
and speaking out for the values of Christ;
individual Christians should prayerfully vote for the party
with the policies they think most support kingdom of God values,
but the Church must never become politicized
in the sense of being owned by one side or another.
And in our increasingly polarized world, this is happening in the States
and is possible here in Australia.

When we go down this path we elevate a cultural
Christianity over the actual words of Jesus
and we are in danger of acting like his family members in Nazareth
who rejected Jesus for asking too much of them.

Edited text of Reclaiming Jesus in a time of Crisis. Sojourners Community

I. WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).
Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God in some of the children of God. Racial
justice and healing are biblical and theological issues for us, and are central to the mission of
the body of Christ in the world.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our na-
tion on many fronts, including the highest levels of political leadership. In particular, we
reject white supremacy and commit ourselves to help dismantle the systems and structures

that perpetuate white preference and advantage. Further, any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin— one that goes back to the foundation of our nation and lingers on.

II. WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28).

THEREFORE, WE REJECT misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognize these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.

III. WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. (Matthew 25: 31-46) “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are “oppressed,” “strangers,” “outsiders,” or otherwise considered “marginal” is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are being made into cultural and political targets, and we need to remind our churches that God makes the treatment of the “strangers” among us a test of faith (Leviticus 19:33-34). We won’t accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children, and we will resist repeated attempts to deny health care to those who most need it. We confess our growing national sin of putting the rich over the poor. We reject the immoral logic of cutting services and programs for the poor while cutting taxes for the rich.

IV. WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. A commitment to speaking truth, the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, “You shall not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16), is foundational to shared trust in society. Falsehood can enslave us, but Jesus promises, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32). The search and respect for truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined. The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation’s highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behavior of families and children. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

V. WE BELIEVE that Christ’s way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (the world) lord it over them, and their great

ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-26). We believe our elected officials are called to public service, not public tyranny, so we must protect the limits, checks, and balances of democracy and encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger that threatens democracy and the common good—and we will resist it. Disrespect for the rule of law, not recognizing the equal importance of our three branches of government, and replacing civility with dehumanizing hostility toward opponents are of great concern to us.

VI. WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples (Matthew 28:18). Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16).

THEREFORE, WE REJECT “America first” as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal. We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth’s resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God’s children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable.