

Sunday 05 July 2009

Homeboy Jesus not recognised

**A reflection on the Gospel reading for the day:
Mark 6: 1 - 6**

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This sermon was largely developed by Julia Denny-Dimitriou, preaching at St Paul's, Pietermaritzburg, on the same day

Full Lectionary Readings for the day – Gospel only used for sermon:

Ezekiel 2: 1-5

Psalm 123

2 Corinthians 12: 1-10

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Begin with one of those “Man arrives at the Pearly Gates of Heaven” stories, even if you’ve heard it before:

Man caught by a flood stranded on his roof. Prays to God: “O Lord, please rescue me.” Neighbour comes by in rubber dingy, offers man lift. “No thanks, I’m waiting for God to rescue me”; neighbour goes away. Water getting higher all time, prays to God: “O Lord, send an angel and please rescue me.” Teenager on a jet ski comes by, offers to rescue him. “No thank you, I’m waiting for God to rescue me.” Water nearing top of roof, so he prays even more fervently to God: “O Lord, I need a miracle – please rescue me.” A helicopter hovers above roof, offers to rescue him, but he refuses, saying, “I’m waiting for God to rescue me.” Helicopter flies off to help others. Inevitably, man drowns.

Gets to heaven very angry, and the first person he sees is St Peter so launches into him: “Why didn’t God answer my prayers? I prayed and believed but God let me down.” Peter lets him rant on, and when he has calmed down, phones God on the golden phone. The answer comes back: “God says did you not see the dingy, jet ski and helicopter I sent to rescue you?”

Man in joke a bit like people of **Bethlehem** heard about in Mark’s gospel.

Read passage again, from “The Message” version of the Bible: **READ MESSAGE**

Man in joke had certain ideas about God. Expected God to behave in certain ways. His limited knowledge of God, his assumptions about who God is and how God works blinded him. Like people of Bethlehem “tripped over what little he knew” and could not see that God was indeed answering his prayers, not once but three times, only not in the way he expected with an angel or a miracle.

People of Bethlehem thought they knew Jesus, they’d known him as a baby, then a young boy, maybe as a teenager. He was just “Mary’s boy”. There was absolutely no way he could be anyone special, no way he could be God! They knew about God, knew God would send them a mighty military and political saviour to deliver them from the hated Romans.

They just knew this very ordinary man, this carpenter’s son could not be the promised Messiah. Who did he think he was, showing off in the synagogue with his fancy knowledge of the scriptures and his learning. He was just one of them and should have known better. He should have known his place. They were certainly not going to make a fuss or let him think he was “an important somebody”, because he wasn’t. And they just **knew** for a fact that he wasn’t.

Today’s scripture passage suggests some important questions we need to ask ourselves as individuals and as a community of believers. They are the kind of questions we would do well to ask from time to time to check up on ourselves.

Firstly, are **we** perhaps tripping up on what we think we know about God and failing to see God at work in our lives? Are **we** perhaps blinded by our attitudes and assumptions about who God is and how God works and failing to see the rescue helicopter overhead?

Because God **is** at work in our lives. Every moment of every day whispering our names, calling our names, maybe SHOUTING our names to draw us deeper into relationship, into trust, into love with God. Every day God is weaving Godwonders before our very eyes to show us how much we are loved. I wonder how much we see? How much we are willing to see; or how much we are like the people of Jesus’ hometown or the man in the joke.

Then, are we perhaps blinded by our assumptions; by what we “just know for a fact” about other people **and** about God? Are we perhaps failing to see God at work in other people’s lives, as God was in Jesus; or perhaps working in our lives through others, like man in joke? Sometimes in community we forget to respect each other as unique and wonderfully made people with divine potential, because we are so familiar we can slide into being dismissive or a even a bit contemptuous.

Are we perhaps missing out on what God is doing or perhaps wants to do in us and in others because we have certain ideas about God. We expect God to respond and behave in certain ways, if God doesn’t stay in the Godbox we have designed, we just don’t recognize God.

Offer you these questions to reflect on during coming week.

Want to end with a very powerful story that echoes the theme I have talked about.

### **GOD LIVES UNDER THE BED**

I envy my brother Kevin. He thinks God lives under his bed. He was praying out loud in his dark bedroom one night, and I stopped to listen, 'Are you there, God?' he said. 'Where are you? Oh, I see. Under the bed...'

I giggled softly and tiptoed off to my own room. I am often amused by Kevin's unique perspectives on life. But that night, there was something else too. I realized for the first time that Kevin lives in a very different world from me.

He was born 30 years ago, mentally disabled. He is 6-foot-2, but apart from his size, there are not many ways in which he is an adult.

He reasons and communicates with the capabilities of a 7-year-old, and he always will. He will probably always believe that God lives under his bed, and that aeroplanes stay up in the sky because angels carry them.

I wondered if Kevin realizes he is different. Is he ever dissatisfied with his monotonous life? He gets up before dawn each day, to go and work at a workshop for the disabled, comes home to walk our dog, eat his favorite supper of macaroni-and-cheese, and later, go to bed.

The only variation in the routine is wash days, when he hovers excitedly over the washing machine like a mother with her newborn child. He does not seem dissatisfied.

He goes out to the bus every morning at 7:05, eager for a day of simple work. He wrings his hands excitedly while the water boils on the stove before dinner, and he stays up late twice a week to gather our dirty washing for next day's laundry.

And Saturdays are his best! That's the day my Dad takes Kevin to the airport for a milkshake and to watch the planes. His anticipation is so great he can hardly sleep on Friday nights.

And so goes his world of daily rituals and weekend outings. Kevin doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple.

He will never know the entanglements of wealth or power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears or what kind of food he eats. His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they may not be.

His hands are diligent. He is never so happy as when he is working. When he unloads the dishwasher or vacuums the carpet, his heart is completely in it.

He does not shrink from a job when it is begun, and he does not leave a job until it is finished. But when his tasks are done, Kevin knows how to relax.

He is not obsessed with his work or the work of others. His heart is pure. Free from pride and unconcerned with appearances, Kevin is not afraid to cry when he is hurt, angry or sorry. He is always transparent, always sincere. And he trusts God.

Not confined by intellectual reasoning, when he comes to Christ, he comes as a child. Kevin seems to know God - to really be friends with Him in a way that is difficult for an 'educated' person to grasp. God seems like his closest companion.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations with my faith I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then that I am most willing to admit that he has some divine knowledge that rises above my mortal questions. It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap. I am.

My obligations, my fear, my pride, my circumstances - they all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care. They can prevent me from seeing and recognizing God.

Who knows if Kevin understands things I can never learn? After all, he has spent his whole life in that kind of innocence, praying after dark and soaking up the goodness and love of God.

And one day, when the mysteries of heaven are opened, and we are all amazed at how close God really is to our hearts, I'll realize that God heard the simple prayers of a boy who believed that God lived under his bed.

Kevin won't be surprised at all!