

July 4th Mark 6:1-13

Recently Katherine and I watched the film about Paul Potts, the guy who won the first "Britain's got talent", singing Nessun Dorma.

As a boy Paul experienced sustained and vicious bullying which resulted in feeling insecure, he had low self-esteem, he lacked confidence. He self-funded training in Venice at Opera school and was even chosen to sing before Pavorotti but his nerves got the better of him and the Maestro said he didn't think Paul had what it takes to sing Opera.

Films like the one about Paul Potts always start with "based on a true story" but there is sufficient truth in the film version (which stars James Corden) to represent the real story. Paul did receive encouragement from his Mum, his wife and his best friend, but he was constantly belittled and humiliated by school friends and the locals who saw him simply as a target. Who does he think he is singing Opera?

Here is his audition for Britain's got Talent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnp-8GrHOIk>

What is it about human nature that cannot accept someone who is different, or gifted, or outright amazing if they happen to be local?

The comment Jesus makes "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home" was a well-known saying at the time and has been ever since. It's a truism not just about Jesus but all those whose reception at home is undermined with disbelief.

Having said that, the golden post-boxes celebrate the Olympic winners in their hometowns and some places are quicker to celebrate success than others, but not Jesus in Nazareth as our story reveals.

St. Mark isn't too interested in the sermon Jesus preached, but from Luke Chapter 4 we know Jesus quoted Isaiah

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."□

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

To begin with everyone is impressed by his teaching, his wisdom and his insight, but before long the tables turn.

Who does he think he is?

He's only the Carpenter.

We know his mother and his family, James, Joseph, Judas and Simon and his sisters. Who is this to be telling us the kingdom of God is near and to repent?

Such is the strength of their opposition that Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith. He's almost incapable of doing any deeds of power except for healing a few sick people. It would seem there is nothing he can say or do to change their attitude.

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Jesus authority stems from his absolute and obedient faith in God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, yet he cannot intervene against such disbelief. He can't make them believe against their will.

Mark then follows this account with the commissioning of the disciples to go out two by two on a joint evangelism and mission journey. Evangelism – they were to preach about repentance and Mission – they were given authority over demons and were to anoint the sick with oil and heal them.

I think the two stories are linked by Mark very deliberately to give courage and hope to those people who feel very inadequate whenever mission and evangelism are mentioned and who find it almost impossible to share their faith at home, with neighbours and community.

You are in good company – Jesus found it virtually impossible as well. Actually it was even worse – in Mark chapter 3 verse 21 we read that his family thought he was out of his mind.

What is this passage saying to us today?

We have a responsibility to share the good news and to live the good news (evangelism and mission) but there's no point talking if someone is not ready to listen. There's no point giving an answer when someone is not asking a question.

We have to walk the walk and be ready to talk the talk. We are called to faithfulness and obedience, what happens after that is God's business.

At a graduation ceremony at an American University some years ago honorary degrees were being given to various people all of whom gave a speech.

The students were not that impressed and as is the way chatted to each other through the ceremony until, an award was given to Hugh Thompson, who was quite possibly the least educated person there.

He dropped out of college and enlisted in the army and became a helicopter pilot. On March 16th 1968 he was flying a routine patrol in Vietnam over the village of My Lai (Mee Lie) – the same day at the same time as the infamous attack on the village – Gilly referenced this in her contribution to the Good Friday videos we made.

Not only had the village been napalmed, but soldiers had been ordered to fire on the villagers, old men, women, children. As many as 500 were killed.

Hugh Thompson took his helicopter down between the soldiers and the villagers and ordered his gunners to turn their weapons towards the soldiers whom he ordered to stop firing. He saved dozens and dozens of lives. He was nearly court-martialled, and it was over 30 years later his action was recognised and he was awarded the Soldiers Medal.

As he told his story the students listened and then he talked simply about his faith and in particular what he had learned in Sunday School. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

His spoke of his faith, his gave Christian testimony, he spoke the words of Jesus. At the end the students gave him a standing ovation.

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You are not to strive in making sure your life is a shining beacon of faith – or live life as if it were performance art giving glory to God in the hope of drawing attention to faith. We are called to faithfulness and obedience.

We are called to pray and pray faithfully, and be ready to speak of our own experience and faith in humility and simplicity. The rest is God's business.

Faithfulness and obedience. Those two words have been in mind as I have continued visiting church members to talk about Transforming Trinity.

I draw names at random and I'm just nearing 1/3rd of the names in my bowl of names. I don't know what the outcome is going to be. I certainly hope no-one feels under any pressure or awkward about conversations around pledging.

I simply feel this is the right thing for us to be giving our attention too and discussing. We have to discover, together what we can afford to do and what would be right to do and in all that – me making visits – each person considering if making a pledge is possible we are called to faithfulness and obedience.

And all we do is motivated by love. We pray for others out of love, we share our faith from a place of love, we seek to be obedient and faithful as an act of love, and with that in mind. Let us pray

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