

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 10th June 2018
Second Sunday after Trinity

How can he be so misunderstood?

This is quite an amazing story from Mark's Gospel today, if only because most of Mark's Gospel is about identity, the identity of Jesus. When the gospel opens Mark makes no bones about why he is writing it and who the gospel is about. Mark 1:1 says 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God' (NRSV). Clear, concise and unambiguous. From this point on that is what Mark is telling you about. He is not trying to convince you, or lead you, or convert you. This is what it is.

Then we have several stories that make this clear. At Jesus' baptism the key element is God's declaration as Jesus comes out of the water "This is my Son, The Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mk1:11); then Jesus is tempted and we are told who he is by Satan himself. As Jesus calls his disciples there's no "who are you then?", they just respond and follow as he says, "Follow me I will make you fish for people." (Mk 1:17). If that is not enough, Jesus' power is demonstrated as a witness to who he is as he heals a man with an unclean spirit that cries out "what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth...you who are the Holy One of God?". He teaches with authority in the synagogue so that everyone is amazed (Mk 1:21-28). And so it goes on until we reach this passage in Chapter 3.

You would have thought by now everyone would have got it. Jesus has healed, taught, performed miracles, touched lives, even been witnessed to by Satan and God. So how come the Pharisees and his own family don't get it. His family try to restrain him, the Pharisees from Jerusalem claim he is possessed.

A biblical scholar would suggest, on one level, that these passages are so placed and structured as to make a literary point. The preceding passages have indeed been telling the reader who and what Jesus is; this passage is about the thoughts and feelings of those on the ground. Remember Jesus quotes from the Isaiah when he says "Prophets are not without honour, except in their

hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house” (MK 6.4). Those who are close cannot see what is happening in his life. All they can see is the son, brother, neighbour or cousin with whom they grew up, who they love and cherish and who they wish to protect. There is a real human element here, but one that is misplaced and lacks a realisation of who and what Jesus is.

On another level the claim of the Pharisees aims to make a theological statement and to be a counter argument to one that was probably made against Jesus at the time. Where did his power come from? If you do not believe he is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God where does this authority that spans the entirety of creation, that is itself supernatural, come from. If not from God, then it must be from the devil. Mark may have told us, the reader, who Jesus is; the characters of the story must learn for themselves.

This leaves us with a question that Jesus posed to his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (Mk 8.29). From this question comes our understanding of our relationship with and to him. If you believe he is the Son of the Living God then such a claim has consequences. If we claim him to be the Christ then we should be about doing his will: serving his people, proclaiming his love and teaching the good news to the world. After all isn’t that the charge he gives to us through his disciples. This should also be a liberating charge, born through our renewed and deepened relationship with Jesus. We can’t do these things purely out of duty, they must come from a living faith in him who was sent into the world to bring wholeness and healing. This living and dynamic faith comes from our answer to Jesus’ question, “who do you say I am?”

As we gather around this altar, this communion table we share in a meal. It is bread and it is wine. But to those who answer Jesus’ question it must be far more than that. It must be our witness to him who died and rose again for us. As we receive this bread and wine it becomes for us his body and his blood, through our faith in him who ascended to be at the right hand of the Father. Through us being gathered here as brothers and sisters in Jesus, we witness to the power and wonder of Jesus ministry here amongst. We become those whom Jesus calls his brother and sister and mother. Jesus asked “who do you say I am?”