

Contexts

Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

Mark 6:1-6 – things to notice

- Follows immediately from last Sunday's Gospel reading
- Jesus moves from the shore of the lake inland to Nazareth – to his own hometown
- Jesus' miraculous actions of stilling the storm, exorcising a demon, curing the sick and raising the dead proceed this episode.
- Jesus the teacher, teaches in his local synagogue.
- At first the people are astonished, then they ask where he got all this – that is, who is his teacher? The origin of Jesus' power is God.
- It seems that this Jesus is not the same as the Jesus they once knew.
- The sense of irony is built with further questions: "is this not the craftsman, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon?"
- "Son of Mary" may be an insult since sons in Jesus' day would usually have been referred to as the son of their father (not their mother).
- Their astonishment and wonder has turned to negativity.
- "And they would not accept him", a better translation perhaps is: "They were scandalised at him". Origin of 'scandalised' in Greek is 'stumbling block'.
- Jesus quotes the proverb about a prophet only being without honour in his hometown.
- And he could do no miracle (mighty work) there – Mark's focus is on the lack of faith displayed by the people – though he did cure a few sick people.
- Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

Traditionally, the prophets in the Bible had a pretty tough time. Many experienced rejection and persecution and even death. The first reading tells part of the story of Ezekiel's call to be a prophet.

Common to all the prophets is the conviction that the Word of the Lord must be spoken to the people 'whether they listen or not' - the prophet must remain faithful to his vocation even if it costs him his life.

In the Gospels Jesus is presented as the prophet *par excellence*. In this Sunday's Gospel we find Jesus in his home town, Nazareth, teaching in the synagogue - faithfully fulfilling his mission to proclaim the Good News. As for many other prophets, that proclamation will eventually cost him his life. Like the other prophets, Jesus, too, experiences rejection. At first the people marvel at Jesus' teaching and the miracles he has worked, but soon they decide that he is just 'a carpenter (craftsman)' whose family they know well. Nothing special to be seen here, they seem to think. The old saying: familiarity breeds contempt seems to sum up their attitude, especially when they refer to Jesus as the son of his mother. Jews were customarily known by their father's name even if the father had died. Jesus is astonished at their lack of faith.

Faith, in this context, implies an openness to perceive the presence and action of God (the Kingdom). Clearly, the people don't perceive the action of God in Jesus in spite of the impressive words he spoke and the miracles he performed. Were Jesus' family circumstances just too ordinary for them? They couldn't look beyond what was familiar to them in order to see God at work in him. Without that essential openness Jesus finds he can't work any great miracle among them even though he can cure a few sick people.

Faith is about being in relationship with Jesus (and therefore, with God). Relationships grow as people come to know and understand each other. In a faith relationship, we change as we begin to get to know Jesus and we come to see with his eyes, feel with his heart and act with his intention in the world.

Only when we begin to see with the eyes of Jesus can we perceive the otherwise 'hidden' presence of God in human beings and events. We begin to see the sacred 'hidden' in the secular and the ordinary.

Only with faith can we see the action of God enfolded in the ordinary and familiar, the presence of the divine in the human, the sacred in the secular. So, to us, the division between sacred and secular almost disappears and almost everything appears 'sacred', not just 'merely' human or secular.