

## HOME AND AWAY (and BOXES)

Mark 6:1-6 [MW18-22]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 24 June 2018

At a tea for officers and their wives, the commanding general of a base delivered a seemingly endless oration. A young lieutenant grumbled to the woman sitting beside him, "What a pompous and unbearable old windbag that man is!" The woman turned to him, her face red with rage. "Excuse me, Lieutenant. Do you have any idea who I am?" "No ma'am," the man fumbled. "I am the wife of the man you just called an unbearable old windbag." "Oh," said the lieutenant. "And do you have any idea who I am?" "No," said the general's wife. "Good" said the lieutenant, getting up from his seat and disappearing into the crowd.

"Just who do you think you are!"

- in some ways it's the ultimate put down  
most of us can probably recall that being said to us  
being put in our place most forcefully
- I can recall at least one high school teacher saying that to me  
not a pleasant memory

Sometimes it is said you can "never go back", "never go home"

- because people remember you as you were and inevitably people have changed  
they are not the same person they were when they left
- I know of people who have been lay people, or even a curate, in a parish  
and when they have gone back as Vicar it has been very difficult

And the kind of thing that happened to Jesus in this morning's gospel

- still happens in communities today  
and, I'm sorry to say, in churches too
- I've heard it and seen it for myself ... maybe you have too  
mutterings from the back pew ...  
"who does she think she is, standing up there and telling us how to pray!?"  
"who does he think he is challenging us about the way we live?!"

This is what is happening to Jesus in his "hometown church" - the synagogue

- Jesus has been away and now he's come home for a visit  
and like a "guest speaker" he's been invited to teach at the synagogue
- Jesus is a Rabbi, complete with disciples and a growing reputation  
and the people have turned out in force to see him
- so do they welcome him, cheer him, hang on his every word???  
do they ... ???  
do they what!

Jesus did as he had done in other places – went into the synagogue and taught

- however in this case his teaching was greeted not with wonder or acclaim  
but with a kind of disdain  
they took offence at him
- they were scandalised that someone who came from a background like his  
should say and do the things he did  
familiarity had bred a mistaken contempt

The people of Nazareth refused to listen to Jesus for two reasons ... first

- remember what the people said when Jesus began to teach???
- “How can he do this? Where did he get such wisdom and power ...  
... isn't he the carpenter ...”
- “the carpenter” - they spat the word out like it was poison
- and yet the word used actually means a 'craftsman'  
someone who could build ships, temples and houses  
anything from a chicken coup to a home, who could turn his hand to any job
- person of considerable skill and experience  
yet the people of Nazareth looked down their noses at him, despised him  
refused to listen to him ... and why?
- because he was a working man  
a layman, he worked with his hands for goodness sake

Jesus was a simple carpenter

- what would he know about God?  
he had never been to theological college, had no letters after his name  
he had no training and no experience
- so the people in that synagogue in Nazareth looked disdainfully at Jesus  
nodded their heads to each other and said  
what could this man possibly teach us ...

But hold on a moment, before we soundly condemn those synagogue nay sayers

- let us be realistic and recognise we sometimes, perhaps unthinkingly  
or unwittingly, and yes maybe even deliberately, do the same thing
- sometimes we do not give credence to what people say  
because of their background, their lack of training or experience  
because of who they are or where they have come from
- this morning's gospel is a wake up call  
God does not only speak and act through the people we think He should

I like how Bible scholar William Barclay puts it:

The people of Nazareth despised Jesus because he was a working man. To us that is his glory, because it means that God, when he came to earth, claimed no exemptions. He took upon himself the common life with all its common tasks.

The second reason people refused to listen to him

- was because they knew his family  
they knew just where he came from  
there was no greatness there, nothing startling, nothing out of the ordinary
- perhaps today we are more enlightened  
and allow that people can rise above their background
- and then again, perhaps not ... how often have you heard things like:  
look at her family, if she doesn't act like that now she soon will  
you can't go against your genes
- or: you can't trust him, just look at his father and brothers  
a bunch of criminals the lot of them
- or just as damning:  
they're all so ordinary, how could she be any different?

“Who do you think you are, you upstart Jesus!?”

- when he came back to Nazareth I guess it was something he felt he had to do but it was not something he enjoyed
- standing at the front of the synagogue in front of all those people all too aware of the dark mutterings and murmurings
- sometimes it is said New Zealand is a 'nation of knockers' that we enjoy cutting the tall poppies down to size
- Jesus experience of coming back to his hometown was just like that maybe he should have stayed away ...
- they should have been proud should have been happy at the blessing of God he could bring them should have welcomed him with open arms and open spirits
- but they didn't, they didn't ... because they knew him

They knew him growing up, they knew his family, they had him figured out

- so where did he get off teaching them in their synagogue? who did he think he was?
- Jesus was someone in a box that's where he was in their eyes: in a particular box

Yet Jesus was more than people thought

- Jesus would not be boxed Jesus' whole life and ministry demonstrated “box breaking” and highlights a universal truth
- people are always more than we think and we must never lock them in a box, nor should they lock us in

Popular fiction is full of box-breaking

- precisely because it touches something deep in the core of our being: that we are more than what people think of us
- so we have Clark Kent, boxed by everyone as the mild-mannered reporter who breaks free and literally soars
- dirty Cinderella becomes a shining princess the ugly duckling is transformed into an elegant swan a down-home farm kid named Dorothy Gale gets to visit the fabulous land of Oz
- we love these stories because the people in them have done what we find ourselves powerless to do: break out of the box and show people that there really is more to us than they think

Yet this is the message of the gospel: we are more than we show

- the call of the gospel is to live this out to be more than we or other people think to be in fact exactly as God thinks, as God sees us
- and real life gives us examples of this happening:

Womanizing Thomas a Beckett was the carousing and drinking buddy of King Henry, but when Thomas became Archbishop of Canterbury he wound up defending the church against Henry and gave his life for it. Stunned, Henry never thought he had it in him.

Who would have thought that a rich, popular, spoiled, dissolute kid, baptised Giovanni di Bernadone, running with his rat pack, would break rank, as it were; that he would heed a dream in which a voice told him to “serve the Master, not the man,” a dream that slowly got to him and made his old life of partying less and less attractive until one day, breaking out of his playboy image, he got off his horse and embraced a leper? He then went home, rejected his inheritance and walked away forever from his riches to become Francis of Assisi. And his shocked friends thought they knew him!

Unlettered, ignorant Bernadette held fast to the vision of the Lady at Lourdes, and withstood ridicule and persecution from the high and the mighty. Everybody thought she would fold. Nobody ever thought she had it in her to be so steadfast.

I am sure you can come up with your own examples

- of people refusing to be bound by the box they were put in  
breaking out and being so much more than people thought
- like Paula Bennett, a solo mum at 17, raising her daughter alone  
and we all know how that is regarded in New Zealand society
- she worked menial jobs, occasionally received a benefit, then studied at university,  
entered politics and is now Deputy Leader of the National Party
- she broke out of the box

In this line, preacher and writer William J. Bausch says:

... there is in each of us an authentic call to holiness, to quiet heroism. We have it in us. Every one of us ... we are called to live beyond the box, do the unexpected, the heroic deed, take the unpopular stance, express the transcendence within us, and allow others to do the same.

What does this gospel good news mean for us here and now???

- do not put people in a box  
look what the people of Nazareth missed out on  
because they thought they had this Jesus sussed
- do not put down or limit people  
look for and encourage their potential

It also means do not allow yourself to be boxed in

- you are more than you think  
the gospel message is we are always more than people think  
we are, in fact, exactly as God thinks
- take a few seconds and consider that  
try to grasp the full weight of that: you are exactly as God thinks

Please take this away with you

- please take this home with you:  
you are not as the world, your family, other people, or even you think  
you are as God thinks
- now it's over to you to take the step  
and let God's assessment show