

When you look into a heart

Mark 6:1-13

Rev J Shannon

I have to confess, I love Mark. This is believed to be the first gospel written ...and all the others were based on this. Mark writes like a journalist – just the facts, mam. There or no frills, no additions, no added beliefs or opinions – just the story as he knew it. Each gospel elaborated on this until we get to John where he just sat down and rewrote the whole thing for his time and including his opinions. I love Mark. He leaves it open for you to fill in the blanks...he is the plain-wrap of Gospel.

This passage is in two parts. The first part Jesus goes home and preaches in his local synagogue. He doesn't get the reception he had hoped for but rather was ridiculed as ' ah, Joseph's boy, what would he know?' . How many of us are heroes in our home towns? And the 2nd part, he is sending out the disciples with a few instructions and no questions. They just accept it with a ' no problems, you want me to jump over mountains for you – will do!"

You see we all seek validation and it rarely comes from where we expect it. How many in this room wondered if they would ever gain their parents' approval? How hard we try. My dad was one of those people who always held the bar just above where we could reach. He didn't ever say he was proud of us. Sometimes, someone else would say, "your Daddy is so proud of you!" that was news to me. He might talk *about* us to other people but not to us. He left an audio tape to be played after his death and **then** he told each of his adult children that he was proud and was quite specific about what...and about what he had gained or learned by our existence. It was beautiful but perhaps a little late.

My mother was a hard case and to be honest, I just gave up and lived my life. Ros told me she never felt like she gained her mother's approval even as she loved her dearly and she and Bob looked after her for those final years. My mother told me on her deathbed that she was proud of me. What surprised me was how little impact it had. I had lived my life without it and was just fine. There were no angels singing, no back-lit golden clouds or last-minute epiphanies...I felt compassion but not for me, for my mother. Clearly, she felt better saying the things that might have been said before¹. I felt like she had a load of her chest – which is a good place to die from ... but it did nothing for me.

¹ Long after I left home for boarding school, I wrote a song with a chorus that went, "don't forget your toothbrush, and socks for every day, and don't forget to remember what your mother forgot to say."

Validation is wonderful but it doesn't come in awards. I'm not in line for an OBE or an honorary PHD.²

...but during breaks at the National Spiritual Care conference, 3 younger people came up to me at different times to say that they were there and in full flight of their calling because of the encouragement I had given them 5 or 6 years ago. Tears spring to my eyes just talking about it. One of my former chaplains, a taciturn bloke of few words, stopped me to tell me how much he respected me and how grateful he was for the way I did my job as chaplaincy leader. I've been out of that job for years. It was the longest conversation we have ever had. Later in the conference, the man who now holds my former Uniting position, put his arms around me and thanked me while we blessed each other for the journey. It is his job now to shepherd chaplains and pastoral practitioners across the state.

Here, I quote John Willams from a couple of weeks ago, "Discipleship comes with the need to hear God. True discipleship is a progression: It's about hearing, accepting and bearing fruit as we see in the progress of the good seed." Truth is, we never know when we're doing it... it all starts with looking into a heart. How we do it, how we touch people is a way of being, rather than an intentional act.

Geoff dropped everything to be by Sally's side- and she told him the strength that gave her just holding his hand in hospital while decisions were made and news was delivered...That all the validation a parent could ever want. And then a few weeks later our grandson turned to him and said, "you're the best grandad ever!" It was not in response of anything particular...(there was no chocolate or involved). Well, that's priceless. It doesn't get any better.

Sally's accident is terrible and there is still a long road ahead but on one of our coffee mornings she wanted to list all the wonderful things that has come out of it: Time together, time to know the children; time to talk. Time to heal old wounds. Time to sit in the park and have coffee. Being a step-mom is a minefield but we had a time to enjoy each other for the first time since she was a child. We had the best mother's day ever, in fact, our first in 30 years. And that says something. It was a true Women's celebration with our beautiful adult granddaughters and Sally, we spoiled each other royally.

Validation comes in other people's actions, other people's results. Jesus didn't need the approval of the congregation. He didn't need an award to say you're great. He touched the afflicted woman, he healed the Synagogue leader's

² (though secretly, I wouldn't mind being a dame) and I have always wanted a doctoral squishy hat.

daughter³. In the next paragraph of this reading, the disciples are willing and eager to step out in his name. They are willing to take nothing but his word. They are inspired to preach and heal others. What more could we want?

So what is the key to all this? What is the thing that makes a difference between a framed award and an inspiration for action? John O'Donohue said, it's quite simple. "When you look into the heart, do so with the kindness and reverence of candle light."

That includes you – when you look inside, don't seek validation, seek the gentle light that is your call.

³ Mark 4:26-34