

A Message from Mary Beth

Our message from Mark's gospel can be perplexing, if we look at it from our knowledge of Jesus as the amazing, powerful Son of God. How could anyone deny His healing miracles, His great wisdom and teaching? And yet, we see that people in His own hometown, the place where He was known and grew up, did exactly that. They recognised everything great about Him at first but then took offence at Him. I confess to finding this incomprehensible.

But if we put aside Jesus' identity in this story, we can all probably think of instances where this has happened to others, to people who have grown up in poverty and despite their "birthright" overcome obstacles to obtain success. I recently read a book about Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's powerful secretary and right-hand man, who rose well above his working class roots, and in an era where this was most unusual. His success contributed to his execution, ordered by Henry himself.

It is often the case that when a local boy, or girl, makes good, they return home to initial acclaim. But then things can soon turn sour. Acclaim turns into malicious criticism and denial of their success. This is what happened to Jesus. Such behaviour seems to be driven by jealousy and an almost innate human propensity to put down those who do well, whether through material success or through personal attributes like wisdom, charisma or spiritual gifts. Jesus possessed these last three things in great abundance and clearly his neighbours didn't like it.

Sadly, this is a human failing which hasn't gone away. If anything, it has become more potent and destructive in our modern era with the power and immediacy of social media.

In Jesus day, people voiced their criticisms through personal conversations and letters. Today, we have the added dimension of internet chat rooms and messaging, where nasty remarks can easily run rampant, as they are broadcast many times over to numerous subscribers of these electronic platforms. And the limitations placed on these messages, which must be short in length, can render them even more spiteful and malicious in their impact than normal human conversation.

The challenge for us as Christians is how to counter the human propensity toward malice, regardless where it is coming from. It starts with looking into our own hearts and minds, and challenging negative comments we are likely to voice about others. Asking ourselves: what is our motivation; are we speaking constructively or destructively? This is not an exercise of stifling free speech and limiting debate, but of learning how to challenge the ideas of others with grace and fairness.

If we use social media, what tone do we adopt for our comments?

Then there's the challenge of confronting others who appear malicious in their criticism of fellow human beings. How do we try to counter this?

This is a question we might consider in our daily prayers, as we encounter examples of such behaviour. We ask ourselves: what would our Saviour do?

God bless you in all you say and do,

Mary-Beth

