

## Ordinary People - Extraordinary Message

Blacktown Uniting Church Service - for Sunday 24 January 2021

In Psalm 62:9, we read that *common (or ordinary) people are as worthless as a puff of wind, and the powerful are not what they appear to be. If you weigh them on the scales, together they are lighter than a breath of air.*

Ordinary people and powerful people ... the New Int'l version, gives us *lowborn* instead of ordinary and *highborn* instead of powerful.

The Psalmist is painting a picture, here - it doesn't matter whether we are ordinary or powerful, highborn or lowborn, ... in comparison to God, all of us, together, *are lighter than a breath of air* ...

It would be easy to misunderstand this as though the Psalmist was saying that *people* are worthless in comparison to God, but that isn't the case. The Bible makes it clear that every human being is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) so every person, rich or poor, old or young, male or female is inherently valuable, because we are all made in the likeness of God.

The point the Psalmist is making here, is that the powerful shouldn't think too highly of themselves - they shouldn't think they are more important, more valuable because of their reputation, their position, their wealth ... there is a big difference between *being like God* and *acting as though you are God!*

A little later in the Psalm we read - *Don't make your living by extortion ... if your wealth increases, don't make it the centre of your life*

There is nothing wrong with being an ordinary person - in fact, there is something terrific about common, everyday, unpretentious people who don't think too highly of themselves, but rather are genuine and sincere in their care for others ...

Being ordinary or powerful, being poor or rich, being low or high born isn't really the issue - what matters according to the psalmist, ... is God's power and God's unfailing love.

Is this the Good News that Jesus was talking about in Mark 1? The callously rich, the cruel, the heartlessly powerful will *not* win, because they *do not* ultimately hold the power - God holds the power and against all the sin, evil and sadness of this world, God's unfailing love will win. It is worth repeating these verses - *Power, O God, belongs to you*; ... and then the telling statement - because it is not just God's power that carries weight it is God's unfailing love - *unfailing love, O Lord, is yours.*

Let's look a little more closely at Mark 1:

Verses 14 & 15 read - *Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"*

We read that John the Baptist has just been arrested. His role as the final prophet, calling people to respond to God's greatest gift, Messiah Jesus, is now complete - as John said himself *'though [Jesus'] ministry follows mine, I'm not worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals ... he must become greater and greater and I must become less and less (John 1:27, 3:30).* ...

So Jesus now takes centre stage, but let's pause for just a moment with John the Baptist - his clothing, his diet and his shelter (you will remember he lived in the desert) were those of someone who was quite poor - he was ordinary - and yet Jesus said of him - "... *of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist*" (Matt 11:11).

I would like to suggest this morning that John's greatness was due to his relationship with Jesus - John was basically an ordinary man, who was given the responsibility to deliver an extraordinary message in preparation for Jesus.

So, John is arrested, his job is done and then we read the first words that Jesus speaks in Mark's gospel: "*the time promised by God has come at last! ... The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!*"

*The time promised by God has come at last* - Everything promised by God in the Old Testament - from the promise to Eve in the Garden that Satan would be defeated by one of her offspring, to the promise to Abraham that one of his descendants would prove to be a blessing for the *whole* of humanity and through the promises to Jacob, Moses, David and the prophets about a Messiah / Redeemer / Saviour to come - *every* promise of God, every *wonderful* promise, that unfailing love and goodness and truth and mercy would eventually win, is fulfilled in Jesus ...

In 2 Cor 1:20 Paul said - *For all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus.*

This is the Good news that Jesus was announcing - *The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!*"

Human history is a long and complex story where beauty and cruelty sit side by side, where the same battle can give examples of tremendous heroism and awful treachery, where in the same town courageous and loving people sacrifice their lives on behalf of others while others defraud vulnerable people. The human story, our story is one of beauty and brokenness, and that brokenness includes not just broken human relationships but a broken relationship with God - Paul says in Romans 1 that even though people knew of God through the wonders of the creation, they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks.

The Good News is God's unfailing love response to our sin and brokenness, and that response is embodied in Jesus.

Jesus call in Mark 1 - *repent of your sins and believe the Good News* echoes down the centuries to us.

How should we respond to this call? In some ways this is fairly straightforward - Follow Jesus' instructions - *Repent* and *believe*.

To repent basically means to totally change your mind, in fact it means to change your whole approach to life - and in this context Jesus is saying that we, with all people, of every time and every nation, need to change our hearts and minds in relation to God.

What does this actually mean for us today, though?

We have a revealing example in our passage.

*... as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.* <sup>17</sup> *Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"* <sup>18</sup> *And they left their nets at once and followed him.*

<sup>19</sup> *A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets.* <sup>20</sup> *He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.*

... repent and believe?

For Simon Peter, for Andrew, James and John this meant leaving everything behind, including their fishing business and then following Jesus. They would have already known that Jesus was a great teacher and the Holy Spirit would have been prompting them to respond to Jesus' call, but Jesus was calling them to an uncertain and risky future, uncertain finances, uncertainty regarding conflict with the Jewish authorities and Rome, uncertainty in terms of relationships with family - ... repentance and belief for them, took the shape of giving up everything to follow Jesus and to trust him for their future.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John were ordinary people who responded to an extraordinary call, an extraordinary message - the time is fulfilled - the Kingdom of God has arrived - Jesus himself is the Good News and Jesus himself is the unfailing love of God.

... but these ordinary fishermen had to respond to Jesus' call to repent and that meant leaving their old lives behind and following him - ... Jesus' call to each of his followers is unique - there may be things we also need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus and embrace his unfailing love for us.

Whether we are highborn or low born, powerful or ordinary is of no account - what matters is our response to Jesus' call - it was clear for the fishermen what they had to do when Jesus called them - it would be good for each of us to ask ourselves what repentance and belief and following Jesus looks like in our own particular situations?

How would it or how does it play out in your life as you respond to Jesus' call to follow him, to have a mind and heart changed by the Good News of God's gracious love and forgiveness.

What does it mean for you to allow your life to be shaped by your allegiance to Jesus - the Lord and the Saviour?

It could mean carving out a regular space, everyday, for prayer, meditation and Bible reading, it could mean seeking assistance for anger issues or a porn addiction or a critical approach to others, it could mean seeking reconciliation in a difficult relationship, it could mean finding ways to serve or share your gifts within the church. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in this.

Let me remind you and myself(!) that the Good News is not about us measuring up, or living a perfect life, or being an A grade disciple or a super holy Christian - God sent Jesus to live and die and rise from death on our behalf - he lived and died **for us** - his gifts of forgiveness, mercy and unfailing love are freely given if we turn to him and believe.

The Christian Gospel, the Good news is a story of grace and we are called to believe that the extraordinary is true - that the God who created the universe loves each one of us and calls us - ordinary people that we are - to believe in that extraordinary message, by believing in Jesus.

May God bless each one of us, as we seek to embrace the Good News and to live it out in relationships full of grace and love and forgiveness with everyone we know and meet, every day.

Amen